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Cowboy Citizenship:
The Rhetoric of Civic Identity among Young Americans, 1965-2005

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Cowboy Citizenship:
The Rhetoric of Civic Identity among Young Americans, 1965-2005

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Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!
Clouds of the west—sun there half an hour high—I see you also face to face.
Crowds of men and women attired in the usual costumes, how curious you are to me!
On the ferry-boats the hundreds and hundreds that cross, returning home, are more curious to me than you suppose,
And you that shall cross from shore to shore years hence are more to me, and more in my meditations, than you might suppose.

--Walt Whitman, “Crossing the Brooklyn Ferry”

Acknowledgements

In the opening lines of *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau explains his reasons for going to live in solitude with nature. He writes, "I went into the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." If one leaves it here (the way far too many people have), Thoreau's sentiment is a sad one—the way to live life fully is through self-reliance. There is no need for community. On a wintry New England day two and a half years ago, as I was beginning the research for this dissertation in earnest, I stood ankle-deep in snow at the site of Thoreau's beloved cabin and was reminded of his opening words. I thought, at that moment, of this isolated path I had chosen for myself. I had been warned many times of the loneliness in writing a dissertation. Over the past two years, I have found, however, no truth in these warnings. I once read Thoreau's words as wisdom, but this project would have failed miserably had I clung to his advice. While I have spent many hours by myself, I have never been alone, and I owe a great deal of gratitude to a wonderful community of people that have been indispensable to its successful completion.

No one has been more indispensable than Rod Hart. Over the past five years I have been repeatedly amazed at the breadth of his knowledge, the depth of his sincerity, and the truth of his optimism. I have learned a great deal from him about how to be a

better teacher, scholar, and, in the end, a man. He has taught me how to be patient with my work, to be comfortable with my questions (and not my answers), and to be (I hope) a better writer. I also owe him an immense debt for even taking on a "Georgia cracker" to begin with. To think, I got all of this from a carpetbagger.

I would also like to think my dissertation committee—Barry Brummett, Sharon Jarvis, David Leal, and Max McCombs. Their teaching, scholarship and advice can be found on every page. Most importantly, though, I could not have asked for four better professional role models. I am a greater person for having had the opportunity to work with them all.

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Rees for keeping me sane and showing me that the world may indeed be round. You all make me believe in the humanity of humanity.

Cowboy Citizenship:
The Rhetoric of Civic Identity among Young Americans, 1965-2005

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This study has been guided by a belief that everyone has a civic identity—*a sense of self emerging from one's response to community demands, to the processes of governance, and to the recognition of power relations*—and that a number of important societal changes occurring over the last fifty years have been affecting these identities. To get at how people have been responding to these social changes, this project has asked the following questions: (1) What unique role does civic identity play in an individual's life? (2) Given this role, are there multiple manifestations of civic identity within a given population? (3) Have the dominant rhetorical manifestations of civic identity changed over the course of late-modernity? (4) If changes are found, can these differences be reasonably connected to causal factors resulting from changes in society at large? To answer these questions, I chose to look at the language of young adults over the past forty years in seven high school newspapers from around the United States, using a set of critical probes to facilitate the message analysis conducted.

Four emergent trends were found. American youth have increasingly become (1) *cosmopolitan flaneurs*, losing connection with the local as they have come to locate community at the national and international level; (2) *removed volunteers*, finding a sense of civic engagement in the acts of donating and volunteering while eschewing traditional forms of political participation; (3) *protective critics*, taking a decidedly negative stance toward the mediated spectacle of politics; and (4) *independent joiners*, coming to see most political issues as private matters and only joining groups for self-interested reasons. Tying these trends together, I argue that today's young adults have adopted a kind of cowboy citizenship—somewhat homeless, somewhat distrustful, and resolutely independent. In the end, I ask how this new form of civic identity may be affecting the health of the American democracy.

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CHAPTER ONE

Concerning Citizenship

The experience of democracy is like the experience of life itself—always changing, infinite in its variety, sometimes turbulent and all the more valuable for having been tested by adversity.—Former President Jimmy Carter

Democracy does not happen on its own. It takes time and effort. But the American people can be reluctant to get too involved in the governing of their country as President Jimmy Carter found out first-hand in the fall of 1980. In the summer of 1979, as the United States faced an economic crisis and growing lines at the pumps, Carter asked the nation's citizens to take a long, hard look at themselves. The problem, according to the president, was that "in a nation that was proud of hard work, strong families, close-knit communities, and our faith in God, too many of us now tend to worship self-indulgence and consumption. Human identity is no longer defined by what one does, but by what one owns."[1] Carter went on to suggest that he needed the American people to work on restoring their confidence in themselves and in their government. The American people thought that Carter was asking a bit too much and so, in November of the following year, they elected a former California Governor and ex-movie actor who did not expect too many commitments or sacrifices from the electorate. According to many observers, the American people have become even more reticent about getting involved in the act of self-governing.

[1] James Earl Carter, "Crisis of Confidence," July 15, 1979.

The American people, that is, seem increasingly unwilling to tend their democracy. The political and social health of the United States is like an overgrown garden, its planters having retired inside to their air-conditioned homes to watch *American Idol* and read *Who Moved My Cheese?* Being given scant attention, the garden has become overgrown with weeds and infested with insects. The vegetables carefully planted so long ago hang rotting on limp stalks. This image, according to many observers, is the picture of civic engagement currently facing the United States. If a democracy is to remain healthy, they argue, it must have an adequate level of attention from its citizenry. Although the exact level of involvement needed for democratic principles to flourish is uncertain, the declining political participation found during the past half-century has many worried. And nowhere is this concern more salient than among those concerned with young adults. From the nation's leaders to local community activists, concerned citizens across the United States agree that young Americans in general have become increasingly removed from the political process, both electoral and otherwise. Few agree, however, about what needs to be done to reinvigorate the public sphere. Fewer still agree on the sources of the problem.

In assessing this general malaise among young adults, scholars most often cite the declining voter turnout among 18 to 24 year-olds. Young Americans today are, indeed, failing to show up at the voting booth on election day. As The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (CIRCLE) reported in 2002, "the only thing we know for sure is that the rate of youth participation has declined since 1972—by any

reasonable measure."[2] But by how much? Since 1972, Lopez and Levine argue that voting among 18 to 24 year-olds has declined by almost a third. According to the Census Current Population Surveys to be more precise, 18 to 24 year-olds had a voter turnout percentage of 52 percent in 1972 but have fallen precipitously to 37 percent in 2000, a drop of fifteen percent. And things only get worse when we look at non-presidential general elections. In the 2002 general election, only 23 percent of young adults voted despite the 2000 election fiasco and the terrorist attacks of September 11th. These numbers show that less than one-fourth of young adults cast ballots for their local representatives, national senators, and governors. These concerns can, of course, be carried outside the voting booth: Young people read the newspaper, a key indicator for participation, less often than their parents and grandparents.[3] They are more ambivalent about the role of government than previous generations.[4] A 2002 study of young adults by Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, for instance, found that young adults were ambivalent about their role in the political sphere and had low levels of efficacy toward the political process as a whole.[5] Robert Putnam has, in addition, shown that young

[2] Peter Levine and Mark Hugo Lopez, *Youth Voter Turnout Has Declined, By Any Measure*, Report prepared for The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (September, 2002).
[3] Stephen Earl Bennett and Eric W. Rademacher, "The 'Age of Indifference' Revisited," in *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X*, ed. Stephen Earl Bennett and Stephen C. Craig (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 21-42.
[4] Stephen C. Craig and Angela C. Halfacre, "Political Issue and Political Choice," in *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X*, ed. Stephen Earl Bennett and Stephen C. Craig (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).
[5] Lake, Snell, Perry & Associates, *Short-Term Impacts, Long-Term Opportunities*, Report prepared for The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (2002).

adults today are less knowledgeable about public affairs than previous generations of young people, "despite the proliferation of sources of information."[6]

Democratic citizenship takes work. It always has. That people no longer engage in traditional politics at anything close to the level they did fifty years ago is, however, a problem of our times. People today have greater contact with ever-growing numbers of persons from distant corners of the globe. The way people work and how they do business have been dramatically altered. And communication has undergone nothing less than a series of revolutions. Late-modernity has presented individuals with a series of changes influencing how they interact with the world around them. That they would have to adapt today to this changing environment described above seems only natural. They are, to a large degree, the products of their environments. These changes are not, however, only occurring in their actions, attitudes, or behaviors. These changes are affecting them at their very core. To understand these changes, we must understand people's identities, their very sense of self. Those concerned with political participation and civic involvement must look at a source of identity heretofore largely ignored—civic identity. Civic identity, which will be laid out more explicitly below, provides a means of understanding how individuals perceive their role as community members and political actors. By examining civic identity in America's youth, we can begin to answer the more difficult part of the problem mentioned above—the cause of the decline in traditional forms of political participation.

[6] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 36.

More specifically, by exploring the civic identity construct and how today's young people enact it, I propose a series of specific research questions: (1) What unique role does civic identity play in an individual's life? (2) Given this role, are there multiple manifestations of civic identity among a given population? (3) Have the dominant rhetorical manifestations of civic identity changed over the course of late-modernity? (4) If changes are found, can these differences be reasonably connected to causal factors resulting from changes (e.g., varying economic structure, demographic differences, specific events) in society at large? Answering these questions will help provide a sense of what new models of civic identity might be built among the American people. The remainder of this chapter describes how and why this research project was created.

Why study identity?

There has been, perhaps, no single word explored more thoroughly in rhetorical and political theory over the past twenty years than that of identity. But interest in the term and its attendant problems did not become a real issue for most people until the modern era. Before political, social, and scientific changes came into play during the past few centuries, a person's existence was thought to be largely controlled within his or her circumstances and locale. It was not until the modern period that social mobility, the notion that a person could become something other than what they were born to be, became a real possibility.[7] Late-modernism has, moreover, exploded this sense of possibilities. As Zygmunt Bauman has noted, while the problem of modernism was to

[7] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

find a stable identity, today's invitation is to explore ever expanding identities.[8] People no longer sense that they have one identity. They are a collection of multiple identities, a juke box of identities, playing whatever song best suits their situation. They can, more importantly, change their songs as newer ones become available. But what songs are being played in our metaphorical juke box? More to the point, where do they come from? What is identity?

To study identity is to understand how an individual comes to recognize a set of shared characteristics with another person, group, or ideal. Identity is not something one is born with, although inherited bodily features can surely lend themselves to different identities later. Rather, identity is something agreed upon or forced upon people as they age. Identity comes from living in a modern society. It begins with an awareness of others and then becomes transformed as people negotiate identities with others. Identity, that is, is a social construction. It is neither given naturally nor produced solely by the individual. As Craig Calhoun has said, "recognition is at the heart of the matter….Identity turns on the interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition of others."[9] Identity comes into being when we attempt to position ourselves vis-à-vis others. As a result, the possibilities for identification in the late-modern world are limitless. As Amy Gutmann puts it, "individuals identify in groups around their gender,

[8] Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (London: SAGE, 1996).
[9] Craig J. Calhoun, *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 20.

race, ethnicity, nationality, class, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, and ideology."[10]

Noting that identity is constructed when the individual positions himself or herself against others is not, of course, without its own set of dangers. Identity is as much about difference as it is about sameness. Anne Norton has pointed this out when arguing that "meaning is made out of difference. Definition begins in negation, in the designation of what a thing is not. The process of separating a name, a word, an identity, from those surrounding it begins in differentiation."[11] That is, who I am begins with who I am not. One identifies with blackness by first not identifying with whiteness or brownness. One identifies as a Democrat by saying "I am not a Republican or a Libertarian." One cannot, then, identify as X if there is no Y or Z to reject. It is difficult, as a result, to see oneself as an Earthling when there are no Martians or Jupitarians available for contrast. In modern times, however, there are ever growing numbers of others in contradistinction to oneself. Predictably, then, identity and its inherent problems have become a dominant preoccupation in the late modern world. Researchers cannot change this condition but they must try to understand how identity is constructed and managed.

My supposition in this project is that identity, or the knowledge of who we are in relationship to others, is constructed discursively and that our understanding of the world around us is limited to and illuminated by language. This is an epistemological perspective on language and meaning inspired by the work of Kenneth Burke. It is, after

[10] Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 10.
[11] Anne Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 3.

all, Burke who defines man rather succinctly as "the symbol using animal."[12] These symbols are, for Burke, "the verbal parallel to a pattern of existence."[13] We come to know, interact with, and respond to the nonverbal world around us through the use of language. Burke further argues that discourse, what he refers to as rhetoric, is bound up with questions of identification. Burke writes, "A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so."[14] Barry Brummett summarizes Burke's notion of identification when observing that, for Burke, "identification occurs when people perceive that their interests are joined, and that they share ways of thinking and valuing. This sharing is embodied in shared ways of speaking."[15] Identity is constructed through sameness and difference and the engine for this construction, according to Burke, is human discourse.

Who we are derives from how we position ourselves relative to others, and it is through discourse that we communicate with others. This is Charles Taylor's argument in his essay on the politics of recognition:

> The crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally dialogical character. We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression…But we learn these modes of expression through exchanges with others…The genesis of the human mind is in this sense

[12] Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 3.
[13] Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 152.
[14] Ibid., 20, italics original.
[15] Barry Brummett, *Reading Rhetorical Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000), 743.

> not monological, not something each person accomplishes on his or her own, but dialogical.[16]

It is through human expression that identity is constructed. The young person grows up reading literature, listening to the radio, watching television, participating in school, living with his or her family. Through all this, the individual builds a sense of himself by identifying, or not identifying, with what these individuals say and do. As such, this process is never-ending. As Stuart Hall has noted, "the discursive approach [to understanding identity] sees identification as a construction, a process never completed—always 'in process.'"[17] This is to say that the construction of identity is never finished and always unstable. We are always already in the process of constructing and stabilizing who we are by discursively interacting with others.

Given such a broad concept, it might seem that there is no end to the types of identities that might be studied. Indeed, researchers have explored a wide spectrum of identities—from how corporate identity can become salient during mergers and acquisitions of companies[18] to how driving a "lowrider" creates identity formation for certain ethnicities.[19] While the study of identity has been wide-ranging, work in the disciplines of communication and political theory has congregated around four dominant forms of identity—racial, gender, national and political. Communication scholar Dexter Gordon, for instance, uncovered how black nationalistic discourse helped define what it

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[16] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 32.
[17] Stuart Hall, "Who Needs Identity?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (London: SAGE, 1996), 2.
[18] J M Balmer and K Dinnie, (1999). "Corporate identity and corporate communications: The antidote to merger madness," *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 4 (1999): 182-92.
[19] Curtis Marez, "Brown: The Politics of Working-Class Chicano Style," *Social Text* 48 (1996), 109-32.

meant historically to be a black American,[20] and Ronald Morgan found that religious tracts in South America helped define Spanish American identity.[21] Judith Butler and John Sloop explored how societal norms helped define gendered identity and exclude those on the sexual margins.[22] A number of recent political and rhetorical scholars have shown growing interest over how national identity came about and have questioned its subsequent effects.[23] Finally, political psychologists and sociologists have explored how identity requires political acceptance and how identity politics affects the larger society.[24] While all of this research has furthered our understanding of the role identity plays in the lives of everyday people, there is still much work to be done. This is especially true in the area of political identity. Almost everyone, after all, is a member of a nation, and most seek, even if at modest levels, political capital for themselves. As a result, the study of civic identity becomes markedly compelling, especially in an era of great change.

Why study identity today?

Before moving into a fuller explanation of civic identity, we must first get a better sense of the historical context that has given rise to the need for such a construct. We can

[20] Dexter B Gordon, *Black Identity: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Nineteenth-Century Black Nationalism* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ Press, 2003).
[21] Ronald J. Morgan, *Spanish American Saints and the Rhetoric of Identity, 1600-1810* (Tuscan: Univ of Arizona Press, 2002).
[22] Judith Butler, Gender Trouble (New York: Routledge, 1990); John M. Sloop, *Disciplining Gender: Rhetoric of Sex Identity in Contemporary U.S. Culture* (Amherst: U of Mass Press, 2004).
[23] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso 1991); Jonathon Glover, "Nations, Identity, and Conflict," in *The Morality of Nationalism*, ed. Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 11-30 ; and M. Lane Bruner, *Strategies of Remembrance: The Rhetorical Dimensions of National Identity Construction* (Columbia: Univ of South Carolina Press, 2002).
[24] See Norton, *Reflections on Political Identity*; Karen A. Cerulo, "Reframing Social Concepts for a Brave New (Virtual) World," *Sociological Inquiry* 67 (1997), 48-58; and Leonie Huddy, "Group Identity and Political Cohesion," in *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, ed. David O. Sears, Leonie Huddy and Robert Jervis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 511-558.

do so by turning attention to how the pressures of the last half century have changed the ways individuals live in modern Western societies, particularly in the United States.

Modernism, as a label for a period of time characterized by a historically unique set of human principles and developments, is not an easy word to define. Simply trying to mark the beginning of modernity causes many an author a migraine. As Stephen Toulmin has noted in *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, some date modernity to the introduction of moveable type in 1436 or to Luther's 1520 rebellion against the Roman Catholic Church. Others hold that modernity did not really begin until centuries later, as late as 1895 "with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* and the rise of 'modernism' in the fine arts and literature."[25] The ending point of modernity is equally problematic. Some date it to the beginning of World War I or to the end of World War II, while others suggest that post-modernity has yet to begin. The confusion is endless and the academic flailing noticeable. Despite all of this, however, there is ample reason to believe that the last several decades define a period of high modernism, or postmodernity.

For the purpose of this prospectus, the roots of modernism will be traced to Guttenberg's printing press in the fifteenth century. Beginning with the printing press represents the first in a long line of human developments—Luther's rebellion, Galileo's scientific discoveries, the French Revolution and Freud's psychoanalysis. All share a common characteristic—they brought into question the absolute authority of God and a priori forms of truth. Humankind's response was two-fold. On the one hand, they were

[25] Toulmin, *Cosmopolis*, 5.

forced to question their own existence[26] and later their very identities. On the other hand, the loss of the absolute order of things led to a search for re-order, a search for certainty through human rationality. This shift in thought is important as it triggered a series of scientific and technological advancements at a pace never before imagined. The first point has already been touched on above in the earlier section on identity. The second point is the impetus, I am arguing, for the concerns mentioned at the outset—the concerns over community and political engagement in the contemporary, western world.

It is not within the scope of this introduction to record humanity's advancements over the past five hundred years. It is, however, important to mention a few developments of the last half century, the unique kinds of pressure referred to as postmodernity. While there have been a number of concerns over the validity of the postmodern age, political scientist Ronald Inglehart has forcefully argued that "a Postmodern shift in mass values and attitudes *is* taking place."[27] Inglehart further asserts the following explanation of this shift:

> The world (or, at least, large parts of it) has moved onto a different trajectory from the one it had been following since the industrial revolution….An empirically demonstrable cultural shift is taking place. The great religious and ideological metanarratives are losing their authority among the masses. The uniformity and hierarchy that shaped modernity are giving way to an increasing acceptance of diversity. An the

[26] Rene Descartes, *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing, 1998).
[27] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 22.

> increasing dominance of instrumental rationality that characterized Modernization is giving way to a greater emphasis on value rationality and quality of life concerns.[28]

These challenges have been changing the world in which we live. While it is impossible to catalog all such pressures or to explore their interconnectedness, I offer several that scholars have investigated at great length. The events below, while not unseen in other countries, have been especially significant in the United States:

Globalization. Put simply, the world has been getting smaller over the past century. While soldiers, explorers, and tradesmen had been traveling great distances around the world for many years, the twentieth century brought with it technological and scientific advances that made it increasingly easier for the average individual to travel to far-reaching places and communicate with peoples vastly different from themselves. These transportation and telecommunications advances have had both personal and political consequences. For the individual, globalization has led to a sense of cosmopolitanism that has replaced, in many cases, a sense of local connectedness. "World citizens" have replaced ordinary community members. Politically, globalization has changed how we do business and has brought into question the nation-state and its viability as a governing institution. Global corporations continue to gain greater amounts of political capital at the same time nation-states struggle to compete in a changing world. For evidence of this trend, note the comments of Tony Clarke, director of Polaris

[28] Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 22.

Institute,[29] during an APEC conference at the end of the twentieth century: "Of the 100 largest economies in the entire world today, 51 are individual transnational enterprises (three years ago, it was 47). Only 49 of the world's biggest economies are nation-states." As companies like Wal-Mart and Monsanto get more powerful each year, for example, the countries of Europe have found it imperative to create the European Union.

Capitalism. Directly related to globalization, most western countries have undergone major economic restructuring that has reached into every corner of society. The global economic pressures mentioned above have transformed western industrial countries into service economies. This trend has had two important effects. First, it has led to higher levels of materialism. It has also, however led to a greater sense of economic insecurity. Among the most important implications of the economic analysis I propose is that it invites exploration of changing relationships among political identity, government and nation. The psychological energy (cathexis) people once devoted to the grand political projects of economic integration and nation-building in industrial democracies is now increasingly directed toward personal projects of managing and expressing complex identities in a fragmenting society. The changing economic structure of western democratic societies has impacted the very way people live their lives and interact with one another.

Communications. As many researchers have argued during the past twenty years, technological advancements in communication have affected the very fabric of society,

[29] Polaris Institute (www.polarisinstitute.com) was launched in 1997 in a response to what they perceived as the growing control of corporations on governmental policies in Canada and elsewhere. One of their main goals is in helping to foster active citizenship.

from changing the way this prospectus is being produced (by a computer instead of a typewriter) to the way individuals talk with one another (cell phones instead of telegrams). Media advancements, in particular television and the internet, have dramatically changed how individuals interact with others and the world around them. The television, which took only seven years to find its way into seventy-five percent of America's households, has received the most attention from communication scholars. Communication and education theorist Neil Postman has gone so far as to suggest that the very act of watching television creates a passive audience.[30] While reading leads one to think analytically about information, "watching television requires instantaneous pattern-recognition, not delayed analytic decoding. It requires perception, not conception."[31] Postman's point here is that young people are learning to be passive receptors of large amounts of information. They are not, by contrast, learning to think critically, something necessary for active civic engagement.

Individualization. The final area of postmodern change that has occurred over the past several decades is what Inglehart referred to above as the end of most, if not all, metanarratives. One of the key features of modernity was that "every stable culture was linked with a congruent authority system. But the Postmodern shift is a move away from both traditional authority and state authority."[32] The individual's connection with his community, that is, was based largely on a metanarrative, but this metanarrative has been diminished in today's world. As Michel Foucault has argued, these metanarratives

[30] Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin, 1985).
[31] Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (New York: Vintage, 1982), 78.
[32] Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*, 79.

conveyed knowledge which advanced the domination of those in power. In the postmodern world, Foucault suggests that the "history of thought, of knowledge, of philosophy, of literature seems to be seeking, and discovering, more and more discontinuities."[33] The individual has been left, then, with the increasingly difficult task of constructing a sense of the world and his or her place in it that is based on subjective understandings of truth and knowledge. This does not suggest that reality does not exist; it simply posits that the way people understand this outside world is no longer as one reality but many realities.

While the four broad areas of societal change over the past century cover a great deal of ground, they do not, of course, paint the whole picture. The same scientific push that helped create the television set also led to numerous medical breakthroughs that have reduced many serious diseases and increased the overall health of society. The same globalizing factors that decreased local connectedness are also responsible for spreading culture and bridging differences. And the same economic factors of capitalism that have led to job insecurity in the United States have also increased the national standard of living. It is not my intent, then, to vilify postmodernity and the changes it has brought about. Too, the four areas—globalization, capitalism, communications, and individualization—do not represent all the pressures of late-modernism, but they do point to one common theme that is central to my study. All four point to a central area of concern in postmodern society—the impact these changes have had on the individual and her relationship with the world around her.

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[33] Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

Western societies are increasingly becoming collections of disconnected individuals. They talk to one another less and less. They distrust each other more and more. At the same time however, it is reasonable to assume that innate in all of us is the need to become a member of something larger than ourselves. Abraham Maslow came to that same conclusion when asserting that the need for belonging follows closely behind a person's need for food and shelter. Even before people can become autonomous individuals (through self-esteem and self-actualization), said Maslow, they must first become connected to others.[34] It is for this very reason that the construct of civic identity is both important and timely. What better way to understand how groups of individuals have adapted to the basic need of togetherness than to search at one of the most basic levels of human identity—how they form civic ties.

Why study civic identity?

When communication scholars take the time to look at civic and political participation among the laity, they usually reduce citizenship to numbers. This reduction is carried out in one of two ways. The litmus test of citizenship is, of course, voting. Researchers note that only half of eligible voters currently vote during presidential elections, which is down from a high of over 60 percent in the 1960s. From these numbers, the arguments then usually follow a trajectory that identifies an apathetic or disenfranchised electorate and then attempts to explain why things have become so bad.[35] The other option is to start counting political knowledge, activities and group affiliations.

[34] Abraham Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation."
[35] See Ruy A. Teixeira, *The Disappearing American Voter* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press 1992).

This last area of work is most notably exemplified by Robert Putnam in *Bowling Alone*. Putnam goes to great lengths to show that today's voters are less knowledgeable, consume less news, and belong to fewer organizations than their more-likely to vote predecessors.[36] In either case, the point of such counting is to find an explanation for the always decreasing numbers: Why do people no longer show up at the polls on election day? What has caused them to retreat from participating in the public, at least the political, sphere? Why do so many adults not know the name of their United States Representatives?

Political and communication researchers have been debating the answers to these questions for quite some time now. Researchers have produced numerous findings to explain why people are increasingly less engaged in the political sphere, including that people today are less knowledgeable about politics,[37] read the newspaper less often,[38] are more ambivalent about the role of government than previous generations,[39] and have less trust in government.[40] Others have pointed fingers at broader changes in society. Thomas Patterson and Martin Wattenberg have suggested that the changes in campaigning (i.e., longer campaign cycles, negative commercials, etc.) have driven the voters away.[41] Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have argued more directly

[36] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
[37] Michael X. Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996)
[38] Bennett & Rademacher, "The 'Age of Indifference' Revisited."
[39] Craig and Halfacre, "Political Issues and Political Choice."
[40] Marc J. Heatherington, *Why Trust Matters: Declining Political Trust and the Demise of American Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[41] Thomas E. Patterson, *The vanishing voter: Public involvement in an age of uncertainty* (New York: Vintage, 2003); Martin Wattenberg, *Where have all the voters gone?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

that it is the tone of reporting that has led to a cynical electorate.[42] A large core of communication research has, additionally, pointed toward the television as the single biggest factor affecting the political participation of people today. With all of this work, one can little deny that money and media are having an impact on how people engage in traditional forms of citizenship. But have we been asking the right questions? Is it a question of real decline or merely a shift in focus?

Rhetorical theorist Robert Asen has recently argued (while proposing a new discourse theory of citizenship) that we should avoid quantifying citizenship because it leads inevitably toward unnecessary qualifications of good and bad. According to Asen, quantifying citizenship carries with it several inherent problems, including imposing unnecessarily limited longitudinal measures, a tendency to distract others from the work of some "scholars assessing the practices of citizenship," a reduction of agency, and conceptualizing citizenship as a zero-sum game.[43] These conclusions led Asen to the following suggestion: "Rather than asking what counts as citizenship, we should ask: how do people enact citizenship?"[44] While Asen's position that citizenship is not measurable may be contested, it is clearly time to reconceptualize how scholars should go about studying political participation and civic engagement. But how should one go about doing such work?

Just as national identity is a way to understand how an individual is shaped by nationality, civic identity focuses on how people connect to their communities.

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[42] Joseph Capella and Kathleen H. Jamieson, Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[43] Robert Asen, "A Discourse Theory of Citizenship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 90 (2004), 189-211.
[44] Ibid., 203.

According to the United States Census Bureau, over 70 percent of Americans lived in an urban area by 1970. By 2000, a little over 80 percent of Americans resided in metropolitan areas of at least 250,000 people or more.[45] The United States is, in short, a society of city-dwellers. In contrast, today's Americans are also the most media-saturated in history, with more than three-fourths of all homes now having internet access. Virtual communities have quickly become the norm. Civic identity acknowledges these facts and assumes that people both shape their communities and are shaped by them. They interact with their neighbors on the block and across the world. They shop in grocery stories around the corner and online. And they are governed by a city council, mayors or city managers, and state and national representatives, as well as powerful multi-national corporations. They exist in communities with others. The concept of civic identity digs deep into language patterns to explain how people present themselves to their communities and how they develop self-meaning as a result.

Living in any community requires one to be many things. One must, either realistically or virtually, be a neighbor. One must, in today's world, also be a citizen. And one must, by design, share the resources of the community. Civic Identity spans all of these community requirements and is defined here as *the sense of self emerging from one's response to community demands, to the processes of governance, and to the recognition of power relations*. This triumvirate of concerns needs some unpacking.

[45] The census bureau defines the term urban and metropolitan with the following criteria: encompassing a densely settled territory, which consists of: core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile.

One's response to community demands. The assumption here is that no one can live alone. They need others to survive. Aristotle knew this when he wrote in *The Politics* that after having found a partner and building a home, "the next stage is the village, the first association of a number of houses for the satisfaction of something more than daily needs."[46] But living in proximity with others is not enough. That is Hannah Arendt's point when she argues that "all human activities are conditioned by the fact that men live together, but it is only action that cannot even be imagined outside the society of men."[47] For Arendt, the need for community is borne out of our need to act, that which we as humans alone have the ability to do, a trait that "is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others."[48] We find this sense of action again in the work of John Freie, who defines community as "an interlocking pattern of just human relationships in which people have at least a minimal sense of consensus within a definable territory. People within a community actively participate and cooperate with others to create their own self-worth, a sense of caring about others, and a feeling for the spirit of connectedness."[49] While Freie's definition may be somewhat romanticized, it gets at the core of community—that sense of togetherness brought about naturally and maintained through action. It is this sense of community with which the first part of civic identity is concerned. Do people identify with their places of residence? Does it mean something special to be an Austinite, a New Yorker, from Oakland? What unique qualities do

[46] Aristotle, *The Politics* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 58.
[47] Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 22.
[48] Ibid., 23.
[49] John F. Freie, *Counterfeit Community* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 23.

people see in their fellow community members? Is active community involvement vital and alive or on the wane?

One's response to the processes of governance. In today's western societies, no community exists without a governing structure and its attendant officials, elected or appointed. To think of government at the city level is to be reminded of the polis, the city-state. Returning again to Aristotle, we find the city-state heralded as a source of self-sufficiency, a "means of securing the good life."[50] The city government exists to provide its residents with the goods and services they need to live happily and productively. In turn, the residents of the city must, at least in democratic theory, give back to the city through the act of citizenship. In short, this component of civic identity explores what it means to people to be thought of as a citizen. While many observers have complained that citizenship is declining, I agree instead with Michael Schudson when he writes, "Citizenship in the United States has not disappeared. It has not even declined. It has, inevitably, changed."[51] Looking at civic identity over time is crucial to tracking the subtleties of these changes. How do individuals perform citizenship today? Have other forms of citizen action replaced traditional forms, such as voting? Or, have individuals pulled out of active involvement in governmental participation both emotionally and behaviorally?

One's recognition of power relations. To live in a community is also to share the resources of that community. For some, this is the very definition of politics. As Harold

[50] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 59.
[51] Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 294.

Lasswell said, politics is about "who gets what, when, and how." In today's materialistic and capitalistic societies, the struggle over resources is constant. But to talk of power relations, one must not focus solely on normal governmental structures. One must also talk of money, of corporations and factories. Civic identity is also about what it means to be a consumer. As Lizabeth Cohen has explored in *A Consumers' Republic*, the political and social problems of the United States, at a broad social level, have increasingly become contested on monetary grounds.[52] Looking at the civic identity of Americans is a way of exploring more carefully how individuals struggle over power and resources in their role as workers and consumers. Do they believe they are doing political work when shopping at Target instead of at Wal-Mart? Are they helping their cities, and themselves, when eating at local restaurants instead of at Applebees or Outback? Are they, in short, aware of civic problems when opening their wallets?

To reside in a community is to be many things. It is to be a community member, a citizen, and a consumer simultaneously. Each day, people are invited to perform, at varying degrees and in a multitude of ways, a complicated civic identity. My study is an attempt to sort through this morass, to find the meanings generated in people when they engage one another in community life.

Why study young people?

There are, of course, many places one could go when examining civic identity. One could, for instance, find senior citizens gathered in assisted-living communities or on the golf course and listen to them reflect on their cities and towns. One could visit

[52] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage, 2003).

businesses and listen to white-collar Americans describe their neighborhoods, their local governments, and the large corporations in which they work. One could also visit local bars and talk with working-class men and women about these same issues. But an especially interesting way to explore civic identity and how changes in the world have affected how people respond to civic responsibility is to look at young people, a group that is actively engaged in the identity-forming business. My purpose in this study is to examine civic identity during this incubation process.

The years of late adolescence are the most volatile of a person's life. It is the period of transition from being a child to becoming an adult. Some might argue, of course, that studying civic identity in young people is misguided because it produces too unstable a picture. I argue, in contrast, that while young people's attitudes may be in flux, two reasons suggest why this is a useful focus for this study. First, because part of my goal is to detect changes in civic identity across time, looking to an age cohort that is actively searching for their identities, trying them on and taking them off, will give us the richest and most subtle forms of evidence available. Richard Niemi and Mary Hepburn have argued as much when suggesting that "political socialization research should eschew most studies of young children and, instead, focus on political learning in the years of most rapid change to adultlike learning capabilities and adult attitudes."[53] Second, despite the reality that young people's attitudes and opinions may fluctuate considerably, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that their core beliefs, their very identities, have already begun to take root. Citing the works of Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson,

[53] Richard G. Niemi and Mary A. Hepburn, "The Rebirth of Political Socialization," *Perspectives on Political Science* 24 (1995): 7.

and Harry Stack Sullivan, William Damon has made just this assertion, arguing that the "specific beliefs and commitments, of course, may change over the subsequent years, but the initial formulation of them during adolescence always has ranked as a key landmark of human development."[54] For the same reasons that educators spend so much time teaching civics education to adolescents, I believe that the very moment when civic (and other forms of) identity are being crafted is precisely the time to examine such self-making processes.

Since the founding of the United States, observers of the democratic experiment have been concerned with the level of political involvement among the American people. For Alexis de Tocqueville, this concern was best understood by looking to the youth of the United States:

> He grows older and begins to become a man, then the doors of the world open and he comes into touch with his fellows. For the first time notice is taken of him, and people think they can see the germs of the virtues and vices of his maturity taking shape. That, if I am not mistaken, is a great error. Go back; look at the baby in his mother's arms;…listen to the first words which awaken his dormant powers of thought….Only then will you understand the origin of his prejudices, habits, and passions which are to

[54] William Damon, "To Not Fade Away: Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young," in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, ed. Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteretti (New York: Yale University Press, 2001), 127.

> dominate his life. The whole man is there, if one may put it so, in the cradle.[55]

Many have, of course, taken Tocqueville's advice and sought to understand the level of political involvement among adults by studying the civic attitudes and beliefs of the young. Democracy, by definition, requires the participation of, at least, the majority of the polity. People are not, however, born with democratic predispositions, just as they are not born communists or socialists. Each successive generation must learn the principles and habits of what society deems appropriate for citizenship from older cohorts. This civic education, informally conceived here, is the lifeblood of any society. If youth do not learn the proper lessons of civic responsibility, democracy cannot survive. Assessing the attitudes of young adults today allows one to get a sense of the electorate of tomorrow.

In helping to launch the field of political socialization, Herbert Hyman called for a "psychological approach to politics."[56] Hyman's reasoning was that "individuals learn gradually and early their political orientations. This is what provides much of the stability of their adult political behavior."[57] For Hyman, politics was not something that suddenly just occurred at the age of twenty-one, when young people became eligible voters. Only a few years later, Fred Greenstein followed Hyman's lead and published his *Children and Politics*, demonstrating that even elementary aged children had attitudes

[55] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.
[56] Herbert H. Hyman, *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 7.
[57] Ibid, 9.

and opinions about their government.[58] Greenstein's work was accompanied by a series of studies exploring the socializing of young children by researchers David Easton and Robert Hess.[59] During the same period, Robert Langton offered a detailed theoretical model of political socialization that he tested with adolescents.[60] By the early 1970s, the political science community was deluged with a series of studies that explored the socialization of young people by their parents, school, friends and communities.[61]

Following this outpouring of research in the area of political socialization, many scholars argue that the field died a sudden, early death. Political socialization research did not, however, end with the 1980s. One of the more important books that helped propel research in the 1990s was an edited collection, *Political Socialization, Citizenship Education, and Democracy*, in which a number of notable scholars reassessed the state of previous work and offered suggestions for future research. The primary concern for these researchers was that young people no longer seemed engaged in the public sphere as citizens.[62] As Diana Owen has recently pointed out, much of the research that emerged in the 90's came from a concern among political socialization researchers "about young people's low levels of knowledge, interest, and engagement in traditional political

[58] Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press,1965).
[59] See Robert Hess and Judith Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); David Easton and Jack Dennis, *Children in the Political System: The Origins of Political Legitimacy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1969).
[60] Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Socialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969).
[61] See M. Kent Jennings and Richard G. Niemi, *The Political Character of Adolescence: The Influence of Families and Schools* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974); Richard M. Merelman, *Political Socialization and Educational Climates: A Study of Two Districts* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).
[62] See Orit Ichilov, ed., *Political Socialization, Citizenship Education, and Democracy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990).

activities like voting."[63] This concern over an increasingly apathetic group of young adults does, in fact, seem to be the leading stimulus for many recent studies.[64] These same worries also led to one additional contributing factor in spurring more research in the area of political socialization—an interest in generational studies. Since the path-breaking work of Michael Delli Carpini in establishing the relevance of generational studies in assessing the transfer of political attitudes and beliefs,[65] political science has seen its share of studies focused on political socialization.[66] Although there are still concerns over the validity of political socialization research, the subfield seems to have found its place in the larger political science community.

Still, political socialization is not without its problems, and many have been concerned with one of its major theoretical underpinnings—whether or not studying the learned behavior and attitudes of children or young adults will actually tell us anything about adult behavior. That is, early political socialization worked from the basic premise that (1) what is learned early will have an impact on later adult attitudes and (2) what is learned early will remain unchanged in adulthood.

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[63] Diana Owen, "Service Learning and Political Socialization," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (2000), 639.

[64] (See Duane F. Alwin and Jon A. Krosnick, "Aging, Cohorts, and the Stability of Sociopolitical Orientations Over the Life Span," *American Journal of Politics* 97(1991): 169-95; James G. Gimpel, J. Celeste Lay, and Jason E. Schuknecht, *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003)

[65] Michael X. Delli Carpini, Stability *and Change in American Politics: The Coming of Age of the Generation of the 1960s* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

[66] Paul Allen Beck and M. Kent Jennings, "Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations," *Journal of Politics* 53(1991): 742-61; Bennett & Craig 1997 Stephen E. Bennett and Stephen C. Craig, ed., *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).

The *structuring principle* holds that specific issues taken up in adulthood are structured from a set of core political associations that were learned in childhood.[67] This argument suggests that while young children do not have a concrete understanding of political issues and policies, they do have a sense of the political world that will later influence the way they come to understand politics. E. S. Greenberg puts it more succinctly when arguing that "adult opinions are in a large part the end product of political socialization."[68] Young children, it has been asserted, learn partisanship, and these party loyalties later define their more specific attitudes. Fred Greenstein argues, for instance, that most elementary aged children have a rather abstract, underdeveloped notion of political issues, but that sixty percent of 4th graders are able to identify the party preference in their state.[69] These party ideologies learned at an early age will, according to Greenstein, later guide the adult political actor. David Easton and Jack Dennis make a similar argument when they suggest that young children learn efficacy at an early age by listening to and watching the adults around them. [70] Presumably, these early lessons of efficacy will later limit or enhance the adult's sense of possibility.

The structuring principle in political socialization research has, however, been questioned over the years.[71] Debates over this point have largely focused on the ability

[67] Hyman, *Political Socialization*; David O. Sears, "Political socialization," in *Handbook of Political Science: Vol. 2*, Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Sears, 1975).
[68] Edward S. Greenberg, "Consensus and Dissent: Trends in Political Socialization Research," in *Political Socialization*, Edward S. Greenberg, ed. (Palo Alto, CA: Atherton Press, 1970), 3.
[69] Greenstein, *Children and Politics*, 71.
[70] Easton and Dennis, "The Child's Acquisition of Regime Norms."
[71] See David Marsh, "Political Socialization: The Implicit Assumptions Questioned," *British Journal of Political Science* 1(1971): 453-65; Donald D. Searing, Joel J. Schwartz, and Alden E. Lind, "The Structuring Principle: Political socialization and Belief Systems," *The American Political Science Review* 67(1973): 415-32.

of researchers to assess the political attitudes of children. As noted above, much of the earliest work in political socialization focused primarily on young children, rather than adolescents. But how does one know that the answer a child produces to an adult's questionnaire really represents that child's opinion? Can one assume that a small child truly understands what he or she is saying? Searing et al. tested the structuring principle and concluded that it was, generally speaking, unsound.[72] David Marsh addressed the same concern but his critique turned out to be more methodological. Marsh notes that the questioning of children through surveys and interviews cannot tell us much about their real attitudes and even less of their later behavior.[73] In the end, political socialization researchers seem to have agreed. With few exceptions, studies produced since the late 1970s by political scientists have focused exclusively on adolescents and young adults. While many might still believe that young children's political attitudes are important to study, political scientists have had to concede that their methods cannot adequately measure these effects.

The *primacy principle* has had a similarly difficult time of it. Early research in political socialization was unquestionably rooted in the assumption that almost all of the adult's political attitudes and basic beliefs were crystallized by the beginning of adolescence. This belief was so taken-for-granted that when assessing the "major problems of political socialization research," Jack Dennis argued that "a standard, general hypothesis is…that the earlier the person adopts a given set of political orientations, the

[72] Searing, Schwartz, and Lind, "The Structuring Principle."
[73] Marsh, "Political Socialization."

less likely it is that these orientations will be eroded later in his life."[74] Not everyone has, however, agreed with this supposition. David Marsh argues that there is doubt about the stability of attitudes and behaviors. Marsh goes on to question the primacy principle, suggesting "that a great amount of research suggests that very few individuals have the type of complex political belief systems which might support and underpin stable political attitudes."[75] Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz end their cohort analysis similarly when asserting that their data "do support the primacy principle as a comparative statement but reveal magnitudes of change that are simply too great to be ignored."[76] As the 1970s came to an end, one of the main causes of the decline in political socialization research was this concern over the validity of the primacy principle. If adult political attitudes were unstable, how could the study of political socialization among children or adolescents illuminate our understanding of the grown-up world of politics?

Much of the new research in political socialization that has emerged since the beginning of the 1990s has benefited from a revised understanding of the primacy principle developed in a series of essays by David Sears.[77] Sears assertion was that "at some very crude level, symbolic predispositions, appear to show high levels of

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[74] Jack Dennis, "Major Problems of Political Socialization Research," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 12(1968): 99.
[75] David Marsh, "Political Socialization," 459.
[76] Donald Searing, Gerald Wright, and George Rabinowitz, "The Primacy Principle: Attitude Change and Political Socialization," *British Journal of Political Science* 6 (1976), 113.
[77] David O. Sears, "Whither Political Socialization Research? The Question of Persistence," in Orit Ichilov, ed., *Political Socialization, Citizenship Education, and Democracy* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1990), 69-97; David O. Sears and Nicholas A. Valentino, "Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization," *American Political Science Review* 91(1997): 45-62. David O. Sears and Carolyn L. Funk, "Evidence of the Long-term Persistence of Adults' Political Predispositions," *The Journal of Politics* 61(1999): 1-28.

persistence after late adolescence and early adulthood."[78] Sears is not arguing that adult attitudes are unchanging. Instead, his argument is that the formation of many attitudes during the impressionable years (adolescence) remain relatively persistent in adulthood. Essentially, Sears began to find a way out of the corner earlier work on political socialization had painted itself into: how does one explain changing adult attitudes about politics? Sears' answer is "simple symbolic politics," a construct that "assumes that political attitudes mainly reflect the affects previously conditioned to the specific symbols included in the attitude object."[79] Put another way, certain highly symbolic political lessons are learned early in life and frame how we later come to understand symbolic attitudes and behaviors, which remain malleable throughout our lives. The structuring principle, then, suggests that examining adolescents' political attitudes and behaviors can tell us something important about changing civic identities more generally.

Conclusion

What it means to be an individual living in the United States has changed over time. What has not changed is that all the American people remain members of various rule-governed communities. Sometimes these communities are immense and the rules written into law and policy, as is the case with nations and states. Other communities can be much smaller with a set of socially agreed upon norms, as one might find in a family or group of co-workers. Still other communities are largely abstract, fluid, and with few rules, as many people are continuing to find in virtual chat rooms. In all cases, however,

[78] David Sears, "The Persistence of Early Political Predispositions: The Roles of Attitude Object and Life Stage," in *Review of Personality and Social Psychology*, Ladd Wheeler and Philip Shaver, ed., (Beverly Hill, CA: SAGE, 1983), 93.
[79] Ibid, 116.

the central idea remains—people coming together to make sense of their world and their place in it. And in each community, people argue with one another, consume information, and share any number of vital resources. That is, they engage in the outward manifestation of an internally constructed civic identity.

This dissertation is an attempt to understand how the civic identity of the American people might have changed over the past forty years. Given the realities of today's world, this task seems particularly important. While I am not unaware of the many young people who routinely act through constructive civic engagement, I am concerned with a nation of young people emerging today that often turns to violence instead of language to work out their differences. Students showing up at school with automatic weapons and teenagers killing one another over cars and clothing may not be the norm, but they are clearly a reality in today's world. Perhaps these are not new problems, but they are today's problems. More importantly, these are community problems. In the end, this study attempts to construct an understanding of young people's civic identities today to see where they may be headed tomorrow.

CHAPTER TWO

Studying Civic Identity

As Chapter One pointed out, old notions of citizenship no longer make sense in the world that has emerged over the past half century. The postmodern shift that has been taking place has changed how people communicate with one another, how they come to understand themselves, and where they see themselves fitting into an increasingly globalized community. Still, too many scholars continue to study notions of citizenship and civic engagement from an empirical standpoint that is based on decades old views of what constitutes a citizen. These researchers count a person's group memberships, quantify the answers to survey questions that date back fifty years, and track changing patterns of voting behavior. Much of this research has subsequently decried the failing state of citizenship, particularly in the United States. In the process, such scholarly work today has ignored how individuals have adapted to their new political and communal environment, an omission the construct of civic identity is meant to correct.

The difference between citizenship and civic identity is central to this study. Citizenship is the legal definition of an abstract relationship between an individual and a state entity and is based primarily on rights. Civic identity is rooted in the actual behavior of people who believe that they are interacting with and impacting the communities in which they live and work. British media scholar James Donald sums up the distinction when he argues that "the problem, of course, is that this legal status as

citizen does not feel as though it has anything much to do with my sense of self. It tells me what I am, not who I am."[1] My study seeks to understand who today's citizens are by asking how they enact civic identity. It avoids the question of whether or not citizenship has declined. Instead, it asks, how the individual's place in larger communities might have changed over time. This requires a qualitative answer instead of a quantitative one.

This project is, then, descriptive. Because I want to avoid assuming too soon what does or does not count as an act of community awareness, I have tried to step back and take a broader picture of civic engagement. This is as Ferdinand de Saussure understood it with language a synchronic and descriptive explanation of civic identity instead of a diachronic and prescriptive assessment of citizenship. To borrow a concept of linguistic anthropologist Michael Agar, I have attempted to avoid the ethnocentric pitfalls that can lead to a deficit theory, the idea that the differences between an ideal citizen and an actual community member will highlight the deficiencies of the latter.

While I have tried to start with a clean slate, I am not wholly unbiased. I believe that democracy matters, both as an idea and as an institution. Or as John Dewey once wrote:

> We have had occasion to refer in passing to the distinction between democracy as a social idea and political democracy as a system of government. The two are, of course connected. The idea remains barren and empty save as it is incarnated in human relationships. Yet in discussion they must be distinguished. The idea of democracy is a wider

[1] James Donald, The Citizen and the Man About Town, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 172.

> and fuller idea than can be exemplified in the state even at its best. To be realized it must affect all modes of human association, the family, the school, industry, religion. And even as far as political arrangements are concerned, governmental institutions are but a mechanism for securing to an idea channels of effective operation.[2]

Because the idea of democracy cannot be realized in the political institutions of a democratic society unless it exists in the individual lives of the people, understanding civic identity is imperative.

Method

While civic identity is a new construct, my concerns here are not. Others have explored some of these same issues, albeit with different methods. While I have been influenced by this research, I believe that civic identity adds something new to the discussion. It is useful to highlight the distinctions between these other research approaches and the perspective I have laid out above.

- Political Socialization "is the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to support of the political system."[3] Researchers in this area primarily use attitudinal and demographic surveys to assess socializing agents in a given community. While such work over the past forty years has done much to explain

[2] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1927), 143.
[3] James G. Gimpel, J. Celeste Lay, and Jason E. Schuknecht, *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 13.

the impact of the family, school, and media on the individual,[4] it has been slow to incorporate several other influential agents or to calculate their meaning-given properties. Most striking, however, is that political socialization research too often reduces the individual to a product of his or her environment with no real sense of social agency and it completely dismisses how that person's identity is articulated in daily life.

- Social Capital research explores how people join and participate in networks of groups.[5] These studies typically find that people join groups less often now than they did thirty and forty years earlier and that people have become civically adrift without these connections. Social capital research then explains these group declines with reference to economic fluctuations or media advancements. Although this work is beneficial for highlighting a community's need to bring people together, it has focused primarily on traditional membership groups (the Elks Club and the League of Women Voters) and failed to note how individuals form civic identities through more informal networks, such as weekly poker games.
- Media Effects primarily looks at how the news media organize information for a relatively passive or, at best, minimally attentive audience. This work includes

[4] See Easton and Dennis, *The Child's Acquisition of Regime Norms*; Hess and Torney, *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children*; Sears, "Political Socialization"; and Niemi and Hepburn, "The Rebirth of Political Socialization.

[5] See Putnam, Bowling Alone; and John Brehm and Wendy M. Rahn, Individual-Level Evidence for the Causes and Consequences of Social Capital," *American Journal of Political Science* 41 (1997), 999-1023.

both agenda setting-research[6] and work in the area of news and issue-framing.[7] In addition, other scholars have looked at the overall attitudes conveyed by the media and argued that these attitudes often push people away from participation.[8] While much of this work has proven helpful to the current endeavor, it has looked almost exclusively at national, passive audiences and failed to see how people negotiate their civic identities in smaller, face-to-face communities.

- Rational Choice Theory is the well-known economic model suggesting that individuals run a cost-benefit analysis to assess the effort needed to participate in civic life and what might be derived from such participation. It was Anthony Downs, the pioneering figure of RCT in political science, who argued that voters have no real incentive to participate in the electoral process because they cannot expect to have any obvious, palpable impact.[9] While such forms of rationalizing most assuredly take place in civic decision-making, RCT fails to explain why people do participate in the political sphere when fully knowing that they will not reap immediate benefits. Because civic identity is concerned with *meaning*, it introduces a new kind of "commodity" to the discussion.

In the end, the concept of civic identity looks more deeply at the underlying reasons why people do and do not participate in their communities. It does not begin with the

[6] Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).
[7] See Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980); Shanto Iyengar, *Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues* (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1991); and Capella and Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism*.
[8] See Roderick P. Hart, *Seducing America: How Television Charms the Modern Voter* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1999); Patterson, *The Vanishing Voter*; and Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*.
[9] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957).

premise that citizenship and community are dead or even declining. It does, however, assume that things have been changing. Understanding how people have adapted their civic identities to live in these changing communities is crucial to finding ways to spark community and political engagement.

Methodology

Having chosen who to research, I am then left with the question of how to study them. Identity is, as noted above, a discursive creation. It is created through dialogue. For practical purposes, identity does not exist before it is languaged. Accordingly, I will study language processes here. Given my epistemological assumptions, I could not use survey data for my data collection since surveys do not call for the respondent to, in most cases, speak at length on a given topic in their own words. The closed-answer format of surveys flies in the face of my very construct. Nor does an experimental methodology serve my purposes. Because identity is rooted in language and therefore lies at the core of selfhood, it becomes imperative to examine it in natural, not contrived, settings.

My research approach is also driven by my research questions. One of my central concerns is to learn how civic identity might have changed over time. That is why I have chosen to look at civic identity in young people across a forty-year period, reaching back even before 18 year-olds won the right to vote. This is also why I will not be conducting interviews, running focus groups, or doing ethnographic fieldwork. While all of these approaches would allow me to collect ample amounts of identity-relevant data, they do not allow me to reach back across four decades and watch such processes unfold.

I am left therefore with two choices—rhetorical description or content analysis. While content analysis would be useful for systematically tracking language usage and changes across time, it is not altogether clear how to create a coding scheme for exploring a construct that is not yet well understood. Civic identity, as a construct, still lies beneath layers of language and thus must be unearthed before it can possibly be coded validly and reliably. It is for this reason, in the end, that I have chosen to conduct a rhetorical analysis.

But given all this, where does one find young adult's across a forty-year period discussing civic issues? One immediately confronts the popular assumption that young people do not talk about politics. They may not do so in obvious ways, I reason, but if one looks closely one can find nuanced discussions of just such matters. One common site of political and civic discourse, for example, are high school newspapers. While these newspapers are most assuredly monitored (and perhaps genuinely edited) by at least one teacher/advisor, the intriguing aspect of these newspapers is that they are a site where students communicate attitudes and beliefs about politics directly to their peers. Furthermore, while many high school newspapers may attempt to model themselves after national newspapers, they lack the resources and, more importantly, the highly practiced routines of the modern press. Instead, one finds articles in high school newspapers to be quite fresh and spontaneous—personal narratives and testimonials about how young people view the political process and their civic responsibilities. It is for these reasons of transparency that I have chosen high school newspapers as my database in this study.

It is worth noting that there have been two major cases over the past forty years that have dealt with censorship in high school. The first involved three students in a Des Moines, Iowa, school who were suspended for wearing black armbands to protest the Vietnam War. The case, Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District, was decided in 1969 asserting the full first amendment rights in high school students. In their ruling on the case, the United States Supreme Court pointed out, "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional right to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."[10] In 1988, the Supreme Court offered a different verdict in Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier. Although the court ruling gave greater power to school administrators to censor school sponsored publications, the court was careful to add that the censorship did not apply to publications that are "public forums of student expression."[11] Along with the requirement that school officials show educationally related cause for censoring any student publication, the ruling has widely been interpreted as allowing schools a great deal of latitude. In addition to these federal cases, a number of states, including Kansas and Massachusetts, have passed laws giving student publications greater freedom. While some argue that high school newspapers are still overly censored,[12] there is plenty of counter-evidence that much depends on the individual schools and their administrations.[13] The evidence in the newspapers chosen for this study suggests that the students do get a great deal of freedom, although there are

[10] *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969).
[11] *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlemeier*, 484 U.S. 260, (1988).
[12] Lillian L. Kopenhaver and J. William Click, "High School Newspaper Still Censored Thirty Years after Tinker," *J&MC Quarterly* 78 (2001): 327-339.
[13] Thomas V. Dickson, "Attitudes of High School Principals about Press Freedom After Hazelwood," *Journalism Quarterly* 66 (1989): 165-178.

times in some newspapers where there does seem to be some stronger constraints in place. Overall, these acts of censorship seem temporary as the students routinely address the question of free speech in the newspapers themselves.

In order to get a clear sense of how young people have been constructing their civic identities, seven high school newspapers published around the United States during the past forty years were collected and examined. In order to accomplish the goals of the dissertation, I limited my sample of high school newspapers in three ways: (1) the newspaper must have been in continuous publication since 1965, (2) the school must have an archived collection of these papers, and (3) the school must be currently located in a metropolitan area. The only other criterion has been that the overall collection of schools must be regionally diverse. The following seven schools fit these guidelines:

- Oak Park High School is one of three high schools in the North Kansas City School District. The school sits less than twenty minutes north of Kansas City, Missouri, in a middle-class suburb of ranch houses where the median family income is currently just under $50,000. The school opened in the fall of 1965 and began publishing the school's newspaper, *The Northmen's Log*, within a month of the school's opening. The school's attendance has actually declined over the years, decreasing from a high of 2,300 students in 1968 to 1,977 in 2002. Much like the surrounding area, the school is overwhelmingly made up of white students. Less than ten percent of the current students describe themselves as a minority, with almost four percent of those being African-American and just over

three percent identifying as Hispanic. The Oak Park students represent the most homogenous group in this study.

- Washington High School, which opened its doors in the fall of 1955, is located just north of Phoenix, Arizona in the working-class suburb of Glendale. The neighborhoods around the school represent the second poorest of the seven schools visited in this study. While the student population is more than about 75 percent white, over 10 percent of the students are Hispanic. These numbers represent an overall change in the student population which has become increasingly diversified in the past twenty years. While the school's population topped more than 2,000 students in the 1970s, that number had declined to 1,627 in the fall of 2004. *The Rampage*, which has undergone three variations of its name, began in 1955 as the *Ram Page*, and has been published continuously since that time.
- With a median annual household income of almost $100,000, Newton South High School is the wealthiest of all the schools sampled. Set in Newton Centre just three miles from the Boston College campus, Newton South felt more like a college campus than a high school, and with 92 percent of current graduating seniors continuing on to four-year college, this makes sense. On the morning I arrived at the school, I waited with a group of students for over twenty minutes until the newspaper's advisor, Dr. George Abbot White, finally showed up late to his own class. Although the students are predominantly white (77.8%), the school also has the largest Asian population of students (13.6%) in this study. The

Denebola, which has been published since 1950, was the most professional looking newspaper analyzed. The final edition of 2005 had the same dimensions as the *The New York Times* and was a full sixty-pages long.

- Woodrow Wilson High School is one of two schools in this study to have multiple security guards and a metal detector at the only unlocked entrance. Located in Washington D.C., the school is also the only minority-majority school in the study. Over fifty-percent of the students are currently African-American, a major increase from the predominantly white student base of the late 1960s. Wilson High's economic make-up is deceiving to any passers-by. While the surrounding neighborhood has a median family income of over $80,000, the students at Wilson come from the poorer neighborhoods. Over a third of the 1,476 students received free or reduced lunches in 2004-2005. Over the past few decades, the wealthier families have taken their children out of the increasingly troubled school. The school's newspaper, *The Beacon*, has suffered along with the school, as the paper's quality and frequency has declined in recent years. As the current newspaper advisor—a white woman with only two years on the job—suggested, "these kids have more important things on their minds."
- Mirabeau B. Lamar High School is located inside the loop near downtown Houston, Texas. While the school had 2,040 students in 1967, it has become overcrowded today with more than 3,429 students, making it the largest high school in the Houston Independent School District (and in this study). Lamar High School is also the most diverse school I visited, with 32 percent Hispanic, 36

percent white, and 27 percent African-American. No ethnic group makes up a majority. The student population is made up of lower-middle class students and 37% are on the school's reduced cost lunch program. *The Lamar Lancer* took a decidedly downward turn in the mid-1990s and was abandoned altogether in 2000. In its place, the school began publishing a quarterly news magazine, *Lamar Life*, in full, glossy color.

- Carrick High School is just a few miles south of downtown Pittsburgh, up a long, winding road through a poor, working-class neighborhood befitting the city's Steel Town image. Carrick High School fits just as well. With a median family income of less than $30,000 a year, the school's student population is the poorest in this study. And all of the 1,240 students are forced to walk through one of two metal detectors located at the front entrance—the only doors open during the school day—which is where one can also find the security office with its camera-monitoring station and three security guards. With a student population that is 70 percent White and 29 percent African-American, their have been a number of racial incidents over the years, and school violence seems to be the norm. During my visit, a fight broke out in the library and teachers rushed to the stairwells between each class period. With all of this to worry about, it was surprising to find that *The Carrickulum* was going through a resurgence of sorts, as a new, young advisor seemed to be breathing new life into the school's newspaper.
- Built in 1924, the building which houses Ulysses S. Grant High School in Portland, Oregon, looks like it belongs in Portland—a large, faded-brick building

that is decidedly practical. Placed in the middle of a middle-class urban neighborhood, Grant High is very much an embodiment of the progressive, northwest United States, which is probably one reason it was chosen as the filming location for *Mr. Holland's Opus* in 1995. The school is also predominantly white, with just over ten percent of the students identifying as African American. While it is not unusual to see faculty advisors to high school newspapers come and go with some frequency, *The Grantonian* is the exception in that it had the same faculty advisor from 1978 through 2005. Sunny Stautz's touch can easily be seen in the newspaper, a touch that gave students as much freedom as possible.

Each high school newspaper is unique. And high school newspapers in general have undergone significant changes over the past forty years due to computer technology and desktop publishing. Still, most high school newspapers share a number of characteristics. Each paper usually contains news, opinion, sports, entertainment, and cartoons, all interspersed with photographs and advertisements. Older issues of the high school newspapers were usually four to six pages in length and published between eight and sixteen times a year. More recently, many of the schools in this study have expended the length of each issue but produced fewer editions during the year.

Critical Probes

While my study is guided by the broader research questions outlined above, the job of the rhetorical analyst is to work with text. That is, the rhetorical scholar must be both the architect (rhetorical theory) and the contractor (rhetorical description) of his

work. This latter role requires that one's hands get dirty. It also requires that one come to work with the right tools. I offer my tools below.

While conducting the rhetorical analysis of these texts, I deployed a series of critical probes to systematically understand how students discursively perform their civic identities. These critical probes were intended to help locate their discursive markers. The questions are organized within well-established research concepts of political and civic participation.

1) Central to the research being proposed here is identifying the *sites of community* for the authors of the high school newspapers and learning how they describe these communities.

- What communities (e.g., schools, cities, states, nations) are identified? Do young people focus more on microcommunities (e.g., schools, neighborhoods) or macrocommunities (states, nation)?
- What are the metaphors, the underlying assumptions, used to describe these communities? Is the community described as alive with growth or on the decline? Are the community and its members referred to in terms of a team or a family? Do the authors describe their communities as growing metropolises (future oriented) or comfortable towns (past oriented)?

2) Social capital[14] and civic participation[15] research has repeatedly shown the importance of *group networks* for active participation. It follows, then, that one

[14] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
[15] Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995)

concerned with civic identity must know which groups the authors are knowledgeable about and with which they identify.

- When using collective pronouns, what group affiliations are being identified through the inclusion and exclusion of others? When groups affiliations are made apparent, along what boundaries (school, community, racial, age) are they being constructed?
- Are social and political groups described in positive or negative terms? Do they appear helpful for communities or are they described as divisive? Does the mention of organized groups decline across time?

3) A key indicator that political and social researchers have pointed to in assessing participation and understanding citizenship is one's *political knowledge*. Many scholars, in fact, argue that the higher one's political knowledge, the more likely they are to vote and participate in other ways.[16]

- When discussing political and community issues, what types of evidence are indicated? Is the argument based on personal experience? Is it about the collective good or personal gain? How complex is the argument?
- What sources (e.g., personal, family, media) do the authors offer as support for their arguments? What sources are discounted as unreliable? If the author cites media sources, are they from local or national media?

4) In 1963, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba published *Civic Culture*, where they explored the formation of political attitudes that might be healthy for democratic

[16] Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know about Politics*; Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; and John Zaller, *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

society.[17] Since then, the study of political attitudes, or what I refer to more broadly as *ideological positioning*, remains one of the most salient areas of participation research since positive attitudes foster active participation. The study of civic identity requires a basic understanding of one's attitudes about political issues and institutional processes.

- Does the author's issue position indicate a preference for big or small government? Do social concerns get described as governmental, social, or religious issues? Is the government responsible to the people and therefore required to help set moral boundaries? Or are people described in ways that point towards liberalist tendencies?
- Do the authors position themselves ideologically by identifying political parties (i.e., Republican, Democrat, Green, Libertarian, etc.)? Do they prefer to classify themselves as independents?

5) *Political trust* represents another important area of political participation study. Researchers over the past forty years have argued that political trust is key to one's willingness to engage one's fellow citizens and governmental representatives.[18]

- Does the overall tone of the text suggest the author's personal investment (or cynicism)? If the author is cynical, what sorts of reasons does he or she give for such an attitude? Can major tonal shifts be found across time in the newspapers?
- What adjectives and metaphorical constructs are used to describe elected officials, community leaders, governmental institutions, and corporations? Do political

[17] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press Civic Culture, 1963).
[18] See Heatherington, *Why Trust Matters*.

institutions and actors get framed with the game analogy? Are corporations described as integral to community or as suspect?

6) To gauge civic identity, one must also be able to gauge one's sense of *political efficacy*. Abramson and Aldrich (1982) have found, for instance, that one's sense of efficacy can predict his or her actual participation.[19] As researchers have more recently argued that efficacy manifests itself internally and externally,[20] the questions presented below are concerned with internal, or personal, efficacy.

- When authors employ personal pronouns, do they present themselves as active or passive actors? Are the issues they are concerned with presented as problems with possible solutions? Or is the issue presented as unassailable? Is voting seen as an important right or a hollow responsibility?
- What motives does the author claim in the text for why he or she has drafted this particular message? Does the author see him or herself as an advocate or a victim? When framed as a victim, does the author offer reasons as to why help is needed?

7) In addition to efficacy, one also needs to be concerned with levels of *political affect* to understand civic identity. Researchers have long understood that emotions play a large part in how and why individuals respond to political and civic concerns.[21] More recently,

[19] Paul R. Abramson and John H. Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation in America," *American Political Science Review* 76 (1982): 502-521.
[20] Richard G. Niemi, Stephen C. Craig and Franco Mattei, "Measuring Internal Political Efficacy in the 1988 National Election Study, *American Political Science Review* 85(1991), 1407-1413.
[21] Donald R. Kinder, "Reason and Emotion in American Political Life," in *Reason and Choice in Social Behavior*, Roger C. Schank and Ellen J. Langer, ed. (New York: Random House, 1994), 277-314.

political psychologists have begun to uncover a complex system of affective responses that precede attitude formation and political action.[22]

- What does the tone of the author's discourse tell us about their emotional state? When writing editorials in particular, is the language of the message emotionally charged?
- When especially strident discourse is used, is it a response to personal, moral, or civic issues? What types of these issues generate the most emotionally salient responses?

8) Finally, another area of concern for the study of civic identity is understanding *motive ascription*. This is, on whom does the individual place blame and to whom does he or she direct praise? Knowing who gets blamed when things are bad (and praised when things are good) gives one an idea of where the individual locates power and at what level the concern exists.

- When talking about civic problems, where is blame placed? Who gets praised when things are good? Is the individual described as an active agent or passive victim? Organizations and institutions? How much attention does the author give to money as a problem and/or solution to civic issues?
- Are motival explanations or accusations framed at the personal, moral, or collective levels? If possible solutions are suggested to civic and political problems, where does the author suggest one should turn—family, government officials, local groups, companies?

[22] Leonie Huddy and Anna H. Gunnthorsdottir, "The Persuasive Effects of Emotive Visual Imagery: Superficial Manipulation or the Product of Passionate Reason?," *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 745-778.

In addition to the rhetorical analysis of the school newspapers, demographic data about each local community was also collected to better understand the social situations influencing civic identity. By looking at census data for each community across time, it becomes possible to track changes in population, economic norms, and racial diversity. These data supplement the rhetorical analysis by highlighting influential changes in the community.

Conclusion

To get an understanding of civic identity, I used the critical probes to help guide my reading of the seven high school newspapers in this study. These rhetorical questions serve as a sieve, helping to separate the gold from the sand. My root assumption is that young people today do struggle with what it means to be a member of various communities. This struggle is central to American democracy and its current manifestation within America's youth may be troubling. At times, their sense of community engagement may remind the reader of earlier generations of young adults who are praised today for their past commitments and sacrifices. At other times, the notions of civic engagement that young people have today may seem to have little connection to the American democratic experiment that was envisaged two hundred and thirty years ago. But trying to meet today's young people on their own turf and understand how they have created their civic identities is, I believe, the best way of bringing them into the larger civic conversation.

The problem with sieves is that they are only as good as their construction and only useful for that for which they were designed. With over 15,000 digitally archived

pages of high school newspapers, one can imagine that a good deal got through my study's sieve. It is also true that the study does not lend itself to social scientific validation nor does it allow for the nuances of a case-study. These are limitations I can live with because this dissertation offers a rich description of how civic identity has changed over the past forty years and why that matters today. In the end, I also believe that this dissertation lives up to at least one definition of good rhetorical criticism—"the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and then explaining them in a comprehensive and efficient manner."[23]

Through this rhetorical analysis, I focus on four major concerns of civic engagement, concerns I detail in Chapters Three through Six. In Chapter Three, I focus on where young people locate community. With what different types of community do they identify? How have their community identifications changed across time? Chapter Four examines where young adults locate political power. That is, what forces do young people believe have the greatest potential to impact their community(ies) politically? In Chapter Five, my attention turns to the media's impact on the political attitudes of American youth. Have today's citizens lost the ability to keep politics and popular culture separated? Chapter Six investigates the current assumption that the American people no longer join together civically. Has the U.S. truly become as hyper-individualistic as so many have suggested? Is the social fabric of the United States tearing? In Chapter Seven, I step back and assess the overall implications of the trends

[23] Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 23.

my study identifies and what implications they may have for the health of the American democracy.

CHAPTER THREE

Becoming Cosmopolitan

"It has been said that arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity."—United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan

In 1957, Anthony Downs published one of the most important books of the last century in political science—*An Economic Theory of Democracy*.[1] In it he made a series of important theoretical claims including the argument that citizens have no real incentive to vote. According to Downs, the average person in today's democratic societies, making a rational decision about voting, would measure the benefits gained from casting a ballot against the amount of effort necessary to do so. Given that the likelihood of one's vote actually having any real, tangible impact on the outcome of any election is ridiculously small, says Downs, the rational voter would come to the appropriate conclusion that voting "costs" (in both time and energy) far too much for what one might actually gain. Voting is not, then, worth the effort. Nor is, perhaps, any form of traditional political participation—writing a letter to the editor, calling an elected official, or joining in the activities of a campaign. While Downs' rational choice theory has been critiqued on many grounds including the observation that people in fact still vote,[2] its central theme still offers important insight into citizen participation. Implicit in Downs' assertion is

[1] Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (New York: Harpers and Brothers, 1957).
[2] D Green and I Shapiro, *Pathologies of Rational Choice Theories* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994) For a more balanced view of RCT, see also Bernard Grofman, "Political Economy: Downsian Perspectives," in *A New Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Hans-Dieter Klingermann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 691-701.

that the size, both geographically and demographically, of modern democracies has grown so large that even the representative system leaves little hope that one's individual-level participation will ever have a clear or rewarding impact on either the political process specifically or the community more generally. Politics is, after all (and perhaps primarily), about how groups of people share the resources of a given community and there has been perhaps no single question in the history of democratic theory more often asked than this: How big is too big for the democratic principles of civic participation to flourish?

Given this perennial question, in this chapter I investigate where young people in the United States locate their primary political communities and how that has changed across the last forty years. Specifically, I ask the following questions: Where do young people locate their political communities? With what different types of community do they identify? How have their community identifications changed across time? By looking closely at where young people locate community, I demonstrate the movement of high school students' political concerns from the local to more national and international issues. As young adults have focused more on global problems, they have in turn neglected local problems and issues. This shift makes sense, I argue, in light of the postmodern globalization that has been taking place over the last fifty or sixty years. Young people are, quite simply, responding to their changing world. In the end, I argue that this shift in where young people locate their primary political communities may be good—the benefits of cosmopolitanism—and bad—the dangers of too much distance.

Political Communities and the Importance of Size

Aristotle pondered the question of political community and proportion over two centuries ago and answered quite clearly that the city-state was the most fitting size. In Aristotle's city-state, or polis, an association of villages combined to reach a level of self-sufficiency produces the necessary means for securing "the good life." [3] But how many people does a self-sufficient city-state require? Unlike Plato, who offered a firm number of 5,040 citizen farmers and their families and slaves,[4] Aristotle is reluctant to be overly precise. Aristotle does suggest that there must be a limit in size when he argues that "most people think that if a state is to be happy it has to be great,…but they do not know how to judge greatness and smallness in a state."[5] Aristotle is suggesting, of course, that a great state does not have to be a large state, and he eventually offers a clear indication of the acceptable size of the ideal city-state:

> The activities of a state are those of the rulers and those of the ruled, and the functions of the ruler are decision and direction. In order to give decisions on matters of justice, and for the purpose of distributing offices on merit, it is necessary that the citizens should know each other and know what kind of people they are. Where this condition does not exist, both decisions and appointments to office are bound to suffer, because it is not just in either of these matters to proceed haphazardly, which is clearly what does happen where the population is excessive.[6]

[3] Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. T. A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin, 1991).
[4] Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).
[5] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 403.
[6] Aristotle, *The Politics*, 405.

Given that the ideal city-state requires citizens to know one another, one can easily see that Aristotle's city-state looks much like a small American city. Perhaps Aristotle would have been quite happy with Mayberry. And for almost two thousand years hardly anyone disagreed. The city-state became the democratic model. Today, however, the city-state is little more than an academic tool used to theorize the potentials of direct, unfiltered democracy.

Sometime around the eighteenth century a new political community model emerged in the form of the nation-state. According to Benedict Anderson, nation-states came into being when three important cultural changes occurred: 1) the disappearance of a predominant and overpowering script-based language that controlled ontological truth, 2) people no longer believed in the divine nature of monarchs, and 3) the very notion of time, both historically and cosmologically, was altered. [7] These cultural shifts, along with the advancement of capitalism and the printing press, created the groundwork for the modern nation. The inherent problem with the nation as a political community, however, is that it functions in direct contrast to the most important aspect of the success of the city-state. That is, nations consist of millions of individuals who "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them."[8] For this reason alone, nations are imagined communities. Each member must imagine, or accept a national narrative, that he or she lives in the *same* community with millions of unknown fellow community members. While the nation may indeed be an imagined and problematic

[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 36.
[8] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

political community, in the past three centuries it has clearly and effectively replaced the city-state as the predominant communal form.

For this shift to the nation-state to occur, however, democracy needed an institutional innovation which came in the form of representation. One can clearly see the importance of representation in expanding the territorial and population boundaries of a functioning democracy by looking at the arguments made by the founders of the American republic. When the arguments about what the new United States should look like were first being made, two camps quickly emerged—the federalists and the anti-federalists. While the anti-federalists feared giving too much control to the newly formed federal government and the executive branch in particular, the federalists offered the benefits of size. In Federalist Paper 10, Alexander Hamilton offered one of the most decisive arguments on the matter when he asserted that a larger republic can best avoid the fractious perils of a smaller republic. And in regard to Aristotle's concern that a citizenry that does not know one another will haphazardly appoint leaders, Hamilton suggests that "as each representative will be chosen by a greater number of citizens in the large than in the small republic, it will be more difficult for unworthy candidates to practice with success the vicious arts by which elections are too often carried."[9] In the end, of course, the representative model won out and the American democratic experiment began. Over the next two centuries, the United States continued to grow and, with the exception of the Civil War, was able to sustain that growth while maintaining the democratic-republican model.

[9] Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, edited by Robert Scigliano (New York: The Modern Library, 2000), 59.

But to suggest that the question of size and democracy has been put to rest by the American model would be hasty. In 1967, Robert Dahl delivered the annual presidential address to the American Political Science Association entitled, "The City in the Future of Democracy."[10] His topic was size: "I propose to ask what *kind* of unit is most appropriate for democratic government" (italics original).[11] Dahl asserts that the matter is still not settled. Of course, he tried to answer it during his presentation. At one point, Dahl imagined a group of learned men sitting around trying to come up with the answer. Six options emerge during the fictitious discussion: the city-state, the metropolis, a metropolitan area, regions, nations, and even a global government. Eventually, Dahl settled on the one he believed to be the best option—a democratic city. Although he made an attempt to suggest that this democratic city is different from the city-state, Dahl suggested something only slightly larger. He argued that "the evidence seems to me to support the conclusion that the all-round optimum size for a contemporary American city is probably somewhere between 50,000 and 200,000, which, even taking the larger figure, may be within the threshold for wide civic participation."[12] After 2000 years of societal evolution, Dahl returned to the polis for the democratic ideal. As a democratic dream, his vision may be admirable, but it fails to take into account the realities of the world in which people actually live.

The primary flaw in Dahl's assertion is that it prescribed a top-down view of citizenship and civic participation. It suggested that if people are sectioned off into

[10] Robert Dahl, "The City in the Future of Democracy," *The American Political Science Review* 61 (1967): 953-970.
[11] Dahl, "The City in the Future of Democracy," 954.
[12] Dahl, "The City in the Future of Democracy," 965.

appropriately sized democratic cities that they will come to understand that this is where their political attention should be focused. The reality is, in fact, that people identify politically with whatever community units they deem most appropriate for their needs, and these units are rarely the smallest unit available to them. How else can one begin to understand the confusing voter turnout results in the United States? In the 2004 presidential election, for example, 60 percent of the voting-eligible population turned out to vote. During the 2002 non-presidential election the number was, however, not quite 40 percent.[13] This suggests that people are more likely to turn out for a national presidential election than one involving only local and statewide candidates. And this turnout discrepancy is all the more startling when one looks at young adults, who may have reached a voter turnout of 47 percent in 2004 but who could not even muster 20 percent in 2002.[14] Although individuals still live in communities of varying sizes (towns, cities, districts), they seem to identify consistently with larger community units.

The issue here is not where people live but with what communities they primarily identify. What Dahl ultimately missed in his assessment of the democratic ideal was the pull that most people feel toward larger communities. That pull has occurred in two distinct ways. The first is through the immense rhetorical power of nationalism in getting individuals to identify with the nation-state. While the national community may be recent, the nation-state has only increased its preeminence in the twentieth century as the primary political community unit with changes in communications, particularly with

[13] Information gathered from http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/voting.html.
[14] Mark Hugo Lopez, Emily Kirby, and Jared Sagoff, "The Youth Vote 2004," Fact Sheet prepared for The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement (2005): accessed at http://www.civicyouth.org/PopUps/FactSheets/FS_Youth_Voting_72-04.pdf.

national media and the television. The second phenomenon, one that Dahl could not have seen in 1957, has been the overwhelming power of globalization. With the increase in transnational corporations, digital communications, and international travel, the individual has had to respond to the ever-closer and more salient global community.

Today's citizens continue to negotiate relationships with increasingly larger political communities. The question of size and democratic participation has not disappeared. It has, instead, become increasingly important at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Tracking where high school students have located their primary political communities over the past forty years offers one a clear view of these changes.

Neglecting the Local

This study looks at high school newspapers, which are designed to report the news of the school in which they are published. As such, the school itself represents the most salient political community represented in these newspapers. That is, the school newspapers deal primarily with information involving administrators, teachers and students within the boundaries of the school itself. While this school news is important to examine, I focus on much of it in chapter 6. The students' relationships to their school communities are not, however, the focus of this chapter. Looking at these school newspapers, one quickly notices that news from outside the school sphere makes it in as well. The object of this chapter, then, is to uncover where young people locate politics.

If one begins with the most immediate political unit outside the school—the one that has been praised as the ideal since Plato and Aristotle—one finds that young people during the last forty years have lost connections to their local cities. This implies, of

course, that the young people represented in this study once had such connections. Indeed they did. Looking back to the late sixties and early seventies, we find that young people were once, in fact, quite aware of the *polis*.

The young people of the late 1960's and early 1970's were clearly aware of their local communities as sites of political struggle. This was especially true for local issues particularly salient to youth. When the state of Massachusetts raised the legal driving age in the late sixties for instance, South Newton's *Denebola* saw fit to publish an article on the new requirements: "Starting at the beginning of 1967, no one may obtain a driver's license until he reaches 16 ½ and then only if he has completed a classroom Drivers Ed course, in addition to six hours of on-the-road instruction and six hours of backseat observation either from his high school or an accredited driving school."[15] And in the spring of 1972, the students at Wilson High School in Washington D.C. seemed excited to report that "plans were announced to establish a Youth and Government program for the District. This program would bring an elected youth mayor, youth city council member, and youth board of education to the District Building to represent the youth of the city."[16] And the students on staff at *The Ram Page* in Phoenix, Arizona offered a half-page story in 1968 on a local curfew change:

> Familiar to all is the pastime of cruising Central Avenue. Students of all schools and ages participate and often stop to indulge in sport activities such as mild riots at the various drive-ins….Then came the crack-down and consequential curfew. The immediate results were evident to anyone

[15] "New Driving Requirements," *Denebola*, September 20, 1967.
[16] "Youth Government," *The Beacon*, May 30, 1972.

> who took a drive down the stretch of Central Avenue between Camelback and Thomas. The only source of activity is at Der Wienerschnitzel and even it is reduced to a tiny percentage of its former inhabitants….In spite of strict police control of the Central Strip, certain young adult elements still cling to their haunts even though the majority of their followers are at home. Since the curfew applies mainly to minors of high school and early college age, the young adult finds himself strangely alone after curfew and heads home.[17]

These are all stories about local politics and how they immediately impact young people in these communities. Laws affect community culture, political decisions increase local opportunities, city ordinances change tradition—and each of these factors influences civic life. That the students are aware of these issues and feel the need to report them indicates their awareness of community politics.

In addition to these local youth issues, the young people in this era demonstrated an awareness of larger political issues in the cities where they lived, issues that did not have such an obvious connection to youth. Wilson's *The Beacon* offered one such story in 1968 discussing a local community group dedicated to helping African-Americans: "Eighteen months ago, Pride Inc. was a dream. Today, according to its members and its leaders, Pride has become an integral part of Washington's black community."[18] One reporter at the *Ram Page* reported on a local hippie gathering during 1967, writing that "The 'hippies' gathered at Tempe Beach for Phoenix's latest 'thing,' a love-in. There

[17] "Central Crack-Down Decreases Gatherings," *Ram Page*, September 20, 1968.
[18] "Pride, Inc. Encourages Dignity in Washington's Negro Areas," *The Beacon*, May 24, 1968.

were no policemen in uniform, but there must have been some plainclothesmen. They could just as well have stayed home, because the love-in was exactly that—a love in."[19] And in Pittsburgh, the staff of *The Carrickulum* reported on the Mayor's 1969 conference: "The Twenty-Fourth Mayor's Highway Safety Conference was held this year, on December 8, at the William Penn Hotel with a special teen session taking place that afternoon."[20] This last example demonstrates not only young people's acknowledgement of larger issues but also local administrators' willingness to listen to youth. Across the late sixties and early seventies, one finds that the young people represented in these newspapers were inclined to cover local political issues even if they were rather removed from their lives. This inclination is particularly striking given the limited amount of room allotted to news coverage in each newspaper.

One other connection young people have with their local communities is through local elected officials. While many of the articles discussing local and statewide politicians tended to focus on their visits to the school, their appearance in the school newspaper is still noteworthy. During the first decade of this study, local officials appeared in a wide array of situations:

- Gubernatorial and senatorial candidates were featured in this week's political forum series. Speaking to students were Tom McCall and Robert Duncan.[21]
- "Washington D.C. is a wondrous seat of government with many, many interesting and historical sights, but Phoenix is a wonderful place to live." This was Mr.

[19] "Hippies Gather at Tempe for Love-In," *Ram Page*, May 12, 1967.
[20] "Mayor's Conference," *The Carrickulum*, December 19, 1969.
[21] "McCall, Duncan Speak to Students on Issues," *The Grantonian*, November 4, 1966.

Eldred Spain's last impression of the Nation's capital where he spent the summer in the employment of Representative John Rhodes.[22]

- Wednesday March 23rd marks the day of the election for the first non-voting Congressional delegate for D.C. The delegate will not have the right to vote on the House floor, however, he will vote in committee.[23]
- As voters would have it, Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy, Democratic candidate, overcame his opponents in a major upset, getting 58% of all votes cast in the election for nonvoting delegate for the District. His nearest adversary, John Nevius, managed to gather 25%.[24]
- George Bush, the speaker for commencement, was elected to his first in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1966 by a five percent margin. He was the Republican candidate for the new seventh congressional District seat in Harris County, Texas, and is the first Republican to represent the county and the city of Houston.[25]

One might think that high school students reporting about political issues and agents in their local communities is not all that striking. Such coverage contrasts, however, with their overwhelmingly absence in subsequent years. While local officials most surely still visit schools and deliver speeches at important youth events, the newspapers represented in this study stopped considering such events newsworthy. Young people, quite simply, quit talking with one another about their local environs as *political* communities.

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[22] "Spain Works for Solon; Thinks D. C. "Wondrous'," *Ram Page*, October 15, 1965.
[23] "Delegate Election Nears; Candidates Pledge Change," *The Beacon*, March 5, 1971.
[24] "Fauntroy Wins, Image Changes," *The Beacon*, April 7, 1971.
[25] "Bush, Allen to Speak at Graduation Programs," *The Lancer*, May 23, 1968.

Although the occasional story about a local political issue that directly affects youth still gets reported from time to time, the frequency with which they appear takes a sharp downturn in the middle of the 1970s. Issues of broader political importance in the local communities disappeared altogether. Gone, too, were references to local and statewide officials, except when the political agent has drawn national attention. And the students themselves seem to be aware of these trends. According to a 1986 *Denebola* survey of the students at Newton South High School, only forty percent of the student population could correctly identify the name of their United States Representative from a list of choices.[26] Young people stopped seeing the importance of local politics and, in some cases, lose touch with their communities completely.

Nowhere is this loss of identification with local communities more obvious than in a number of later articles bemoaning these disconnections. While infrequent, stories promoting students' re-connection with the local community are telling. Two stories offer examples. In *The Carrickulum*, a 1988 story reports on one teacher's desire to get students acquainted with their local community when, "on October 18, The Scholars 4 English classes toured Pittsburgh to familiarize themselves with some of the city's geography, history and culture."[27] And even as early as 1979, reporters at *The Grantonian* found it imperative to offer their classmates a two-page spread on what the Portland area had to offer. Beneath the headline "Reporters find Portland does have 'Places to go and people to see'" were brief articles on local cruising, Portland's disco

[26] "Political Awareness Survey Finds South Clueless," *Denebola*, February 14, 1986.
[27] "Scholars' Class Tours Pittsburgh," *The Carrickulum*, October 28, 1988.

scene, skiing, and how to have fun in the city on little money.[28] In both of these instances, the very act of trying to get their peers to take notice of their cities indicates that a few students were keenly aware that their peers had already lost touch with local circumstances.

In short, while the city-state polis may be the democratic ideal, it no longer attracts the attention of today's high school students. It has not piqued their interest for several decades now. From Washington D.C. and Boston to Phoenix and Portland, young adults represented in this study have decided that local initiatives, city governmental officials, and community problems are not worth their time or energy. But to assume that young people have quit paying attention to politics altogether would be a mistake. Instead, the time young people might have spent on local politics has been given over to other political arenas. Increasingly, American youth have turned their attention to national politics.

Focus on the Nation

Standing in front of the Virginia legislature on June 5, 1788, the great American patriot Patrick Henry, the very same man who once roused an audience to war with his now infamous declaration on liberty and death, questioned the legitimacy of the new federal government just erected. As Henry put it with his gift for the rhetorical flourish, "the question turns, sir, on that poor little thing—the expression, We, the *people*, instead of *states*, of America."[29] Henry's primary concern was that the federal government's power was sure to supersede that of the states, and that the newly established presidency

[28] "Reporters Find Portland Does Have Places to Go and People to See," *The Grantonian*, March 1, 1979.
[29] Patrick Henry, "Dangerous Ambiguities," http://www.constitution.org/rc/rat_va_04.htm#henry-01

would reign supreme. Henry went so far as to exclaim, "Away with your President! we shall have a king."[30] For Henry, the better system was to keep the locus of power, and by extension the people themselves, rooted within smaller and more controllable states. Henry, in the end, lost this argument.

The federalists feared, perhaps more than anything, factions. Given the large size of the new United States, the federalists had to argue that the United States was not too large for one centralized government. They also had to found a nation, bringing together newly liberated peoples under a new banner. To do so, the federalists needed people to connect with the country and this meant getting them to think outside their local communities. This was the retiring George Washington's point (with the help of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton) when, eight years after Patrick Henry, he celebrated the federal government in his farewell address:

> Citizens, by birth or choice, of a common country, that country has a right to concentrate your affections. The name American, which belongs to you in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism more than any appellation derived from local discriminations. With slight shades of difference, you have the same religion, manners, habits, and political principles.[31]

What is most intriguing in this statement is Washington's privileging of the national over the local. Washington and the federalists concentrated their efforts on drawing the peoples of the United States into a larger political arena. Given these people's common

[30] Henry, "Dangerous Ambiguities"
[31] George Washington, "Farewell Address," http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/washing.htm

language (English) and mutual enemy (the British), Washington's job was not all that difficult.[32] The American nation was well fortified by the time its first president left office.

It should come as no surprise, then, that the young people writing in their school newspapers during the past forty years have consistently shown awareness of their American identity and the national political community. The word "American" is not difficult to find in these newspapers. Identifiers such as Houstonian, Portlander, Arizonan or Pennsylvanian, however, almost never appear. What is especially surprising is how much this national focus increases throughout the eighties and nineties. The presidential races of 1968 and 1972 were barely mentioned at all by youth of that era, but, by 1976, all of the newspapers were talking about Nixon's fall, Ford's failing presidency, and a peanut farmer from Georgia named Jimmy Carter. One way to explain this national increase might be to note the increasing nationalization of television media in the 1970s.[33]

Regardless of the reason, however, young people in the United States had a strong sense of their national political community by the late 1970s. One way to identify this sense of nation is through young people's almost exclusive connection to the president as a political actor. As references to local and state officials decrease, references to the president and presidential candidates increase. Whether discrediting Richard Nixon,[34] defending Ronald Reagan[35] or questioning the actions of Bill Clinton,[36] young adults

[32] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 47.
[33] John Thompson, *Media and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
[34] "We Must Prevent Future Watergates," *Denebola*, March 13, 1974.
[35] "Irangate Overpublicized," *The Grantonian*, March 20, 1987.

have increasingly felt a clear connection to their president while largely ignoring the rest of the political actors impacting their lives. As a representative of a political community, the president becomes the preeminent political actor and remains so throughout this study's timeline.

In addition to the president himself, the only political campaigns reported in the recent high school newspapers are presidential races. By 1984, the only political race discussed in Wilson High School's *The Beacon* was the presidential race. In the October 1984 issue of the paper, the top half of page three was dedicated to the presidential contest. The upper left quadrant offered an editorial on the Democratic candidate Walter Mondale, "Why Mondale?." Another for the Republican candidate Ronald Reagan, "Why Reagan?," appeared in the upper right quadrant. And located directly beneath these editorials was a chart reporting the results of the "Beacon Presidential Mock Election," which Mondale won with 71 percent of the 589 students polled.[37] And one also finds, quadrennially, that each of the seven newspapers represented in this study examined at least the two major candidates for president and most even conducted some form of presidential mock election. More illuminating is that even when students chided their peers for not participating in elections, they most often did so by highlighting the presidential races. Take for example, the following editorial from a 1988 issue of *The Carrickulum*:

> Students today seem completely oblivious to the race that is going on in our country. It is a race that can and will decide our future. It is the

[36] "Impeachment too drastic a punishment for Clinton," *Denebola*, September 1998.
[37] "Why Reagan? Why Mondale?," *The Beacon*, October 1984.

> Presidential campaign for our 1988 elections. It is our responsibility as future participants in the political circus to become familiar with today's candidates. The issues that make up a candidate's platform are arguments that affect our lives. Do we want a strong militarily based country? Are we ready for a black President? Do we have a right to intervene in the affairs of Honduras? It's our world, and many of us in 1988 will be responsible for its future.[38]

This frustrated student cannot understand how his fellow students fail to see how the President's actions directly influence their lives. Electoral politics have become, for the students of the last thirty years, the exclusive domain of the presidency.

The only other political actors discussed with any sort of regularity are political celebrities: the civic leaders and entertainment personalities that voice political opinions reaching a national audience. These political celebrities have clearly caught the attention of young people in the United States. For example, an editorial in *The Grantonian* took umbrage with conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh in 1994 arguing that his political views were "breeding bigotry into the minds of many Americans."[39] In Phoenix, the students at Washington High School offered a 1996 list of shows they wanted to see in a two-page story about talk show television. Their number one choice was "Howard Stern meets Rush Limbaugh for a political debate."[40] In Pittsburgh, "The Senator Trent Lott Controversy" was given a full half page of attention in the February 14, 2003 edition of

[38] "Political Races Grow," *The Carrickulum*, 1988.
[39] "Right-Wing Limbaugh Takes America by Storm," *The Grantonian*, 1994.
[40] "Shows We'd Like to See," *The Rampage*, January 12, 1996.

The Carrickulum.[41] Even Christopher Reeve got their attention as a political actor. In an October 2004 obituary, the writer for the *Denebola* spent three paragraphs on Reeve's acting career and family. The remaining twelve paragraphs were devoted to his work as a "political activist."[42] That these political celebrities have caught young people's attention is not to merely highlight their celebrity status. It is, instead, to highlight their attractiveness as political actors at the *national* level.

It is also important to note that the young adults of the past forty years have increasingly seen political *issues* in national terms. And it is just as important to understand that while young people may have always had some connection to the institution of the presidency, these national-level political issues hit their political radar in the late 1970s and into the 1980s. In Wilson High School's *The Beacon*, for example, the issue of gun violence gets discussed in national terms. After commencing the 1982 article with a local city proposal, the article shifts to a similar law in Chicago. When discussing gun violence in the United States, the writer argues sardonically that during 1979 "in America handguns killed 10,728 people. God Bless America."[43] In a 1987 issue of Oak Park High School's *The Northmen's Log*, the issue of sex education and teenage pregnancy began with four points: "Every 2 minutes, some American teenage girl gives birth. Over 1 million American girls become pregnant each year. Ninety-six out of every 1,000 teenage girls become pregnant. The United States leads nearly all other nations of the world with teenage pregnancy and is still increasing."[44] While these

[41] "The Senator Trent Lott Controversy," *The Carrickulum*, February 14, 2003.
[42] "Christopher Reeve: A Hero in the Real World," *Denebola*, October 2004.
[43] "It's Handguns that Kill People," *The Beacon*, May 1982.
[44] "Sex Education," *The Northmen's Log*, January 16, 1987.

numbers are confusing, it is noteworthy that they are national statistics. Instead of starting out with local pregnancy statistics, the students at Oak Park focused on the issue as a national epidemic. Even a 1995 feature story on gender differences in classes at Newton South High School spent much of its time reporting a Harvard study on gender differences and a *U.S. News & World Report* story on gender bias in schools.[45] What started out as a story about a science class in the high school quickly became a story about a national problem. By the mid-1990s, all issues are national issues.

The young people in the United States have also become keenly interested in national tragedies. While local tragedies most surely occurred in each of these cities, they rarely appeared in the pages of the high school newspapers represented in this study. But national calamities appear in all of the newspapers. The February 14, 2003, issue of *The Carrickulum*, for instance, gave a full half of its front page to "The Tragedy of the Space Shuttle Columbia."[46] *The Northmen's Log* of May 12, 1995 devoted almost a full inside page to the Oklahoma City bombing, arguing that, "the country watched, stunned at the horrific act of terrorism that struck not in Washington D.C., New York or Los Angeles, but in the nation's heartland."[47] For this student, the Oklahoma City Bombing was a local tragedy with national implications. Lamar High School's *The Lancer* devoted its first two pages to the Space Shuttle Challenger explosion in its February 1986 issue, referring to the dead astronauts as American heroes.[48] And all of the newspapers had something to say about the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. As research has

[45] "Lack of Confidence May Lead to Gender Bias," *Denebola*, March 17, 1995.
[46] "The Tragedy of the Space Shuttle Columbia," *The Carrickulum*, February 14, 2003.
[47] "Oklahoma Tragedy Hits Close to Home," *The Northmen's Log*, May 12, 1995.
[48] "In Memoriam: Space Shuttle Heroes," *The Lancer*, February 1986.

consistently argued, national tragedies help the citizens of a nation better understand who they are as a people. That the students in this study wrote of national tragedies while ignoring more localized events highlights their shift toward a greater identification of the nation as a primary political community.

One final note worth highlighting about such matters is that, until the mid 1980s, even international issues and crisis were discussed primarily in terms of domestic issues. Unlike later military engagements (to be discussed below), the Vietnam War was largely talked about in these high school newspapers in terms of its domestic impact. A sampling of these arguments from the late 1960s highlight this point:

- We of the Ram Page believe in the right of free speech when someone has a legitimate reason to express his particular viewpoint, but when a bunch of "mama's boys" afraid of a little hard work start throwing babyish tantrums and defending their actions as free speech, it's time for the government to take action. The new law making it a felony to burn draft cards should be the first of many steps to curb the tactics of these so-called users of the rights of citizenship.[49]
- In view of the numerous much publicized demonstrations against America's Vietnam policy, a group of roving reporters recently asked Wilsonites their opinions on student protests. Out of the 78 polled, three-fourths were against the marches, sit-downs, petitions and draft-card burnings.[50]

[49] "Freedom Demonstrations Unreal," *Ram Page,* October 19, 1966.
[50] "Vietnam Demonstrators Spark Cries of Anarchy, Cowardice, Barbarism," *The Beacon,* November 19, 1965.

- Headline—Student Opinions Vary; Draft Girls-Dodge Army; Vietnam Policy Polled[51]
- Beginning this year the Junior Red Cross is sponsoring a project to send badly needed items to the soldiers in Viet Nam….Anyone wishing to contribute to this project may give items to their homeroom Red Cross representative.[52]
- Probably one of the most posing problems concerning the teenage student today is the draft. Boys especially are plagued by such questions as, "Should I enlist or wait to get drafted?"[53]

As each of these examples makes plain, students were obviously concerned about the Vietnam War. But their reportage also makes it clear that their concerns are primarily domestic in nature.

With national politics now being so powerful, with a presidential race now being the overwhelming focus of most political media, and with community issues being seen as embryonically national in nature, it is little wonder that young people over the past four decades have increasingly related to national politics and a national community. Furthermore, this shift in coverage supports survey research showing that, by the mid 1980s, less that forty percent of young people could name their United States congressman or identify which party currently controlled the House of Representatives.[54] But young people's national focus is about more than just politicians; it is also about the political issues and community problems they believe impact their lives. As I discuss

[51] "Student Opinions Vary; Draft Girls-Dodge Army; Vietnam Policy Polled," *Denebola*, March 24, 1966.
[52] "Red Cross Sponsor Viet Nam Project," *The Lancer*, October 20, 1966.
[53] "Draft Survey Reveals Beliefs," *The Grantonian*, February 14, 1969.
[54] John P. Robinson and Mark R. Levy, ed., *The Main Source: Learning From Television News* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1986).

below, this may be both positive and negative for the overall health of American democracy. For now, however, what is important to note is that the overwhelming national preoccupation of young adults, coupled with major economic and mediated changes around the world, may have led young people to begin identifying with an even larger political community than the nation itself.

As John Hoffman has argued, a sense of national identity is a result of the primacy of the state and the state is a creation of the mechanisms of modernity.[55] With the creation of the nation, however, came another culturally significant phenomenon that propels a shift to globalization—nationalism. A perusal of any recent work in this area shows this connection. A recent volume, *The Morality of Nationalism*, offers an insightful example.[56] According to the authors in this work, nationalism can be seen as the chauvinistic attachment to a nation-state that always already posits itself in relation to a series of others. As members of a nation-state, the argument goes, people are programmed to fear other nation-states.[57] In such a circumstance, one nation and one collective ideology take precedence. Two issues result from this fusion. First, nationalism drives much, if not most, national growth. Second, nationalism makes people keenly aware of the international stage. And just as the primacy of the state leads to nationalism, the shift to the international, in many new and important ways, pushes a people toward globalization.

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[55] John Hoffman, *Citizenship Beyond the State* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2004)
[56] Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan, ed., *The Morality of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
[57] Ibid.

Going Global

When discussing nation-formation, Benedict Anderson argues that "what, in a positive sense, made the new communities imaginable was a half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), and technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity."[58] Anderson's argument suggests that nations result from the forces of modernity. One might, then, argue that the emergence of globalization occurs as a direct result of the interaction among productive relations (capitalism), newer technologies of communications (digitized), and the emergence of a universal language of capital (English). That is, globalization is a direct result of the cultural changes fortified by postmodernity.

In the past fifty to sixty years, there may be no greater political shift than that of globalization. Put simply, the world has been getting smaller during the past century. Politically, globalization has changed the way we do business and has brought into question the nation-state's viability as a governing institution. Global corporations continue to gain greater amounts of political capital even as nation-states struggle to compete in a changing world. For evidence of this trend, note the comments of Tony Clarke, director of Polaris Institute[59], during an APEC conference at the end of the twentieth century: "Of the 100 largest economies in the entire world today, 51 are individual transnational enterprises (three years ago, it was 47). Only 49 of the world's

[58] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 43.
[59] Polaris Institute (www.polarisinstitute.com) was launched in 1997 in a response to what they perceived as the growing control of corporations on governmental policies in Canada and elsewhere. One of their main goals is in helping to foster active citizenship.

biggest economies are nation-states." As companies like Wal-Mart and Monsanto get more powerful each year, the countries of Europe found it imperative for survival to create the European Union.

Globalization is an extension of the capitalistic concerns of international trade; it is also something altogether different and altogether new. As Frederic Jameson puts it in the Introduction to his book *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*:

> What marks the development of the new concept over the older one…is not merely an emphasis on the emergence of new forms of business organization (multinationals, transnationals) beyond the monopoly stage but, above all, the vision of a world capitalist system fundamentally distinct from the older imperialism, which was little more than a rivalry between the various colonial powers….Besides the forms of transnational business…, its features include the new international banking and the stock exchanges…, new forms of media interrelationship…, computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas, along with all the more familiar social consequences, including the crisis of traditional labor, the emergence of yuppies, and gentrification on a now-global scale.[60] (pp. xviii-xix)

Jameson's point here is that globalization is not merely about nations competing in a global market. Nor is globalization simply about the creation of transnational

[60] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), xviii-xix.

corporations. Globalization is about how the average person has come to see a shrinking world.

The assertion that globalization is an aspect of postmodernization is not without its critics. To think of global issues, especially as they relate to economic issues, is not a new endeavor. In 1848, Marx and Engels were aware of capitalism's impact on the world as a whole, arguing that, "modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land."[61] Immanuel Kant was concerned with similar issues when arguing for his notion of cosmopolitan citizenship in *Toward Perpetual Peace*.[62] So too was Adam Smith, who argued that the true reason to accumulate the monetary wealth of gold and silver was to send it to foreign countries in order to buy goods and wage wars.[63] And those skeptical that globalization is something new, something truly postmodern, also have empirical evidence to support their argument. Adair Turner makes the point that international trade as a percentage of gross domestic product is no higher in Britain now that it was in the nineteenth century.[64] As these authors point out, nations have been concerned with the trade of goods to foreign countries ever since nations began to exist.

But the question of postmodern globalization is not one specifically of trade and the cooperation of multiple states in pursuing capitalistic goals. As Hoffman argues, "it

[61] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader,* ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 475.
[62] Immanual Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," *Kant: Political Writings,* ed. H. S. Reiss (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970).
[63] Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991).
[64] Adair Turner, *Just Capital: The Liberal Economy* (New York: MacMillan, 2002), 317.

is rather that there is an interconnectedness between the people of the world and this interconnectedness has been such that something new has emerged."[65] John Tomlinson echoes this assertion when discussing the importance of connectivity and proximity to globalization:

> The condition of connectivity not only underwrites the notion of proximity, but places its own stamp on the way we understand global 'closeness'. Being connected means being close in very specific ways: the experience of proximity afforded by these connections coexists with an undeniable, stubbornly enduring physical distance between places and people in the world, which the technological and social transformations of globalization have not conjured away. In a globalized world, people in Spain really do continue to be 5,500 miles away from people in Mexico, separated, just as the Spanish conquistadors were in the sixteenth century, by a huge, inhospitable and perilous tract of ocean. What connectivity means is that we now experience this distance in different ways. We think of such distant places as routinely accessible, either representationally through communications technology or the mass media, or physically, through the expenditure of a relatively small amount of time (and, of course, of money) on a transatlantic flight. So Mexico City is no longer

[65] John Hoffman, *Citizenship Beyond the State*, 115.

> meaningfully 5,500 miles from Madrid: it is eleven hours' flying time away.[66]

While soldiers, explorers, and tradesmen have been traveling great distances for centuries, the twentieth century brought with it technological and scientific advances that made it increasingly easier for the average individual to travel to far-reaching places and to communicate effortlessly with peoples from around the globe. Such transportation and telecommunications advances have had both personal and political consequences. Largely made possible by the power of the nation and the world's growing push toward capitalism, these same advances have brought forth new, and perhaps unexpected, consequences for the average person and have done so on a daily basis.

Postmodern globalization is, then, a relatively new phenomenon. Its impacts on the lives of people are only now being understood, but the global interconnectedness of the last several decades is having an effect. While young people have clearly turned their attention toward the nation, they have also made another adjustment in where they locate political community—they have turned, more and more, toward the global. This move begins in the mid 1980s.

Suggesting that the impact of globalization begins to have a clear rhetorical impact in the 1980s is not to suggest that young people were unaware of the rest of the world before then. An awareness of others around the globe is already apparent in the lives of American youth in the mid-1960's. This point can be seen most clearly through the overwhelming importance of the American Field Service (AFS) international student

[66] John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999), 4.

exchange program begun in 1946. Indeed, most of the newspapers represented in this study make reference to the students in the AFS program or other foreign exchange students, as the following headlines from the late 1960s and early 1970s make clear:

- Red Cross sponsors potluck dinner to host foreign exchange students[67]
- Stan, AFS student, goes to Ecuador; Gerlinde, WHS's foreign student, arrives in Phoenix from Austria[68]
- Assembly Presents Four AFS Students[69]
- South Greets Tullia Todras AFS Student[70]
- Swedish Student Visits Senior Economics Class[71]
- AFS Hosts Student in '73[72]

Two of the newspapers (*The Ram Page* and *Denebola*) even offered space in each of its issues during the late sixties for the AFS student currently attending their school to write about his or her experiences in America. While the attention given to AFS does indicate that American youth were clearly aware of foreign others, it also indicates that these others and their political problems had yet to become personally relevant. For the young people in the United States, the AFS program was a precursor to the international connectedness that emerged two decades later.

Young adults may have been faintly intrigued by peoples from around the globe following World War II, but they became increasingly aware of those foreign peoples by

[67] *The Grantonian*, February 16, 1968.
[68] *Ram Page*, September 17, 1965.
[69] *The Northmen's Log*, September 27, 1968.
[70] *Denebola*, September 16, 1965.
[71] *The Lancer*, May 5, 1966.
[72] *The Carrickulum*, May 1972.

the mid-1980s. One piece highlighting this global connection was a two-page spread in the December 1985 issue of *The Beacon*. Devoted to Apartheid, the story's lead highlights the integration of others' problems into the lives of American youth:

> We read about it every morning on the front pages of our newspapers, learning of the tension and the violence. We see it every night on our televisions, witnessing the blood and the fire. It is a story and issue which has found its way into our daily thoughts and conversations, into our political beliefs and affiliations. South Africa, and its racial policy of apartheid, has become *a part of our lives*.[73]

A bit dramatic, perhaps, but the point is clear: The problems of the peoples of South Africa have implications for the young adults at Wilson High School. The same is true at Kansas City's Oak Park High School, where in 1985 *The Northmen's Log* dedicated a two-page, in-depth story to one student's seven month trip to Africa.[74] In the October 22, 1998 issue of *The Grantonian*, a feature article argued that students can have their voices heard around the world through Amnesty International.[75] And in the April 2005 edition of *Lamar Life*, students on the staff devoted a two-page color spread to the Asian Tsunami, beginning the story by asking their peers to "imagine being in paradise, lying on a beach, sleeping in, or taking an early morning walk when out of nowhere water comes flooding into the village."[76] The ensuing story discusses both the local impact of the Tsunami in Asia and the international response to the disaster.

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[73] "Apartheid: The Issue," *The Beacon*, December 1985.
[74] "Adventure to Africa Helps Student See World Different," *The Northmen's Log*, November 8, 1985.
[75] "Make an Impact through Amnesty International," *The Grantonian*, October 22, 1998.
[76] "Tsunami: In Asia," *Lamar Life*, April 2005.

While it is important to realize that American youth became concerned with the political and social problems of people in Africa, Asia, and South America, it is equally salient to note that issues once viewed as local or domestic begin to be increasingly discussed with regard to their global implications. At Wilson High School in Washington D.C., a 1992 editorial discusses a recent guest speaker, George H. W. Bush's personal physician Dr. Burton Lee, who spoke of AIDS in America and Africa, pointing to the difference in drug availability.[77] In Pittsburgh, one student began a 2002 article in *The Carrickulum* by stating that global warming had become a major problem ignored by the Bush administration. He ended his article with a suggestion that "no one acknowledges global warming, because if people did, they would have to change a lot in their lives."[78] For this student, the global warming problem is something that clearly impacts his peers and the decisions they make. And in a similar argument that appears in the December 17, 1998 issue of *The Grantonian,* one student editorializes that one of the biggest problems facing his community is the destruction of the environment. He asserts that "We've got six billion people in this world, and that number is only increasing."[79] In the *Denebola*, one story in September 2004 criticized the policies of Russian President Vladimir Putin and ended by arguing that "if his dangerous reforms are not criticized, shot down, and reformed, the world faces the very realistic danger of seeing another tyrant in Russia and facing the fears it had during the Cold War all over again."[80] Even in the safe and wealthy suburb of Boston, the actions of Putin were felt in a very real and powerful way.

[77] Letters to the Editor, *The Beacon*, January 1992.
[78] "How Big of a Problem is Global Warming," *The Carrickulum*, February 20, 2002.
[79] "Save the Whales, Kill Your TV, Hug a Tree," *The Grantonian*, December 17, 1998.
[80] "Putin's 'Reforms' Dangerous," *Denebola*, September 30, 2004.

And in a 2002 editorial in *The Rampage*, one young woman seemed shocked by the obesity and excess of people in the United States, not because of the health of Americans but because of people in the rest of the world: "Around the world in the continent of Africa over 40 million people are starving and in Russia nearly 70 percent of the overall population lives below the poverty line of $30 a month for a family of four."[81]

Finally, one can also see the impact of globalization in young people's language about American military action following the Vietnam War. As mentioned above, the students of the late 1960s primarily discussed the Vietnam War in terms of its domestic issues; this is not true for later conflicts. Starting as early as 1982, students began to consider the lives of others in foreign countries. While making an argument that the United States should leave El Salvador, an editorialist in *The Beacon* argued that the Reagan administration supported "one of the most brutal and undemocratic regimes in Central America."[82] The editorial went on to discuss some of the problems with the El Salvadoran government. In *The Rampage*, one student defended the actions of George H. W. Bush during the Gulf War by arguing that "if America does not take action to end conflict in a situation where it would disrupt world peace, it would lead to world confusion and possibly stronger conflict on a global scale."[83] Clearly a sentiment filled with respect for American superiority, this assertion focused squarely on the international impact of military actions. And this trend only continues with the Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The editor-in-chief of *The Northmen's Log* writes, "It's official. The war has

[81] "Starvation in Some Places, Obesity in Others," *The Rampage*, December 19, 2002.
[82] "America Out of El Salvador," *The Beacon*, May 1982.
[83] "Is World Peace Really Worth Fighting For?," *The Rampage*, January 16, 1992.

consumed us. Every night at dinner, millions watch CNN, MSNBC and FOX News just to see what the United States blew up that day. But just for one minute, put yourself in a different place—Baghdad."[84] And one editorial in Grant High School's *The Grantonian* questioned the national outpouring of patriotism following the September 11th 2001 terrorist bombings:

> Three weeks ago, it would have been in poor taste to attach an American flag to the antennae of your car. Such intense patriotism could lead one to be perceived more as a fascist than a normal U.S. citizen. However, in light of the events in New York and Washington D.C., Americans have been displaying the flag every opportunity they get. It hardly seems odd now to see a two-story red, white and blue banner draped over the front of a house, or someone bearing an American flag t-shirt….As a few of my classmates expressed, it creates an "us versus them" mentality that borders on being dangerously ethnocentric. They fear that American's are determined to seek revenge at any cost.[85]

This student expresses her concern over the national response to the terrorist attacks through an unquestionably globalized lens.

In the end, by reading school newspapers over time, one finds a nation of young people who have come to see their lives as inextricably linked to the lives of people around the world. American youth have increasingly seen themselves as members of a global political community. They have not yet lost touch with their nation, but they are

[84] "Imagining the Unimaginable," *The Northmen's Log*, April 11, 2003.
[85] "American Patriotism Flying High," *The Grantonian*, September 28, 2001.

thinking beyond American borders. They have increasingly understood that the political problems of the United States can have a direct impact on the lives of people living in China, Romania or Ecuador, and vice versa. The young adults represented in this study have become, psychologically at least, global citizens.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored three areas where young people locate political community. I have shown, first, that young people's attachments to local communities have largely disappeared. The students represented here do not care much for their cities or the politics that come with them. And their relationship to the states in which they live is no stronger. Instead, young people primarily identify with the nation-states, seeing themselves primarily as Americans and understanding most political issues as domestic problems. But I have also shown that young adults have increasingly become aware of politics in the global community. With growing frequency, they see their lives in the United States as politically connected to the lives of people all over the globe, clearly sensing that the four corners of the globe have gotten closer. This chapter has been a chapter about place.

This chapter has also been a chapter about size. While young people may feel a greater proximity to their fellow Americans and the global citizenry, this identification is not without its costs and these circumstances could be problematic for both democracy and citizenship. If one assumes, for example, that the cost of participating must be weighed against the expense of taking action (i.e., voting, writing a letter, etc.) and against the possibility of having real impact on the system, one wonders how much actual

participation there can be in a global community. If rational choice theory is correct, then as a community gets larger the possibility of a given person having true impact decreases. As young people in the United States increasingly identify with the global community, that is, one wonders what kind of efficacy they can generate as cosmopolitan citizens.

Those currently working out of the cosmopolitan tradition in political theory begin with the premise that the "international world has become a 'world society' with a global economy, international institutions, transnational associations and federations."[86] More so than at any other time, such observers argue, people today are more connected to the rest of the world's people. David Held (1998), one of the leading thinkers of cosmopolitanism, argues that changing globalization can be understood as two related phenomena: "First, it suggests that many chains of political, economic and social activity are becoming interregional in scope and, secondly, it suggests that there has been an intensification of levels of interaction and interconnectedness within and between states and societies."[87] The United Nations must at least be consulted before most nations go to war. Local commerce in Japan can be negatively affected by an outbreak of Mad Cow disease in Great Britain. And the end of the Cold War can put Billy Joel onstage in Leningrad. As a result of these global changes, cosmopolitanism, in the Kantian tradition, argues that the world is governed by a universal moral tradition and that the

[86] Janna Thompson, "Community Identity and World Citizenship," in *Re-Imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democrac*y, ed. Daniele Archibugi, David Held and Martin Kohler (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 179.
[87] David Held, "Democracy and Globalization," in *Re-Imagining Political Community: Studies in Cosmopolitan Democracy*, ed. Daniele Archibugi, David Held and Martin Kohler (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 13.

underlying value premise of this morality focuses on the equal, individual rights of all global citizens.

For the proponents of cosmopolitanism, Immanuel Kant's *Toward Perpetual Peace* is a foundation for their thinking. In Kant's theory, the world has moved so far toward becoming an international entity that viewing oneself as isolated from the rest of the globe is unthinkable. Kant writes:

> The peoples of the earth have thus entered in varying degrees into a universal community, and it has developed to the point where a violation of rights in *one* part of the world is felt *everywhere*. The idea of a cosmopolitan right is therefore not fantastic and overstrained; it is a necessary complement to the unwritten code of political and international right, transforming it into a universal right of humanity.[88]

What was true for Kant during the last half of the sixteenth century can only be truer with today's current pitch towards globalization. Legal scholar Martha Nussbaum reminds us, however, that the notion of cosmopolitanism reaches back even further than the late sixteenth century when she traces Kant's ideas to the Stoics. In doing so, she highlights the adaptations of cosmopolitanism that have evolved through Kant. For the Stoics, the "life of the world citizen is, in effect…a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm nestling feeling of local loyalties, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one's own."[89] It is this very notion of an isolation among the larger crowd

[88] Kant, *Kant: Political Writings*, 107-108.
[89] Martha Nussbaum, "Kant and Cosmopolitanism," in *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, ed. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997), 35.

that most concerns Kant, who fears the aggression of the individual harbored within communities, most notably nation-states, toward the larger, international crowd. If a nation-state threatens the freedom of others, says Kant, what is right for that nation-state cannot prevail. In response to this problematic, Kant's *Perpetual Peace* attempts to resituate the individual in a natural, reciprocated moral relationship with all the peoples of the world.

By resituating the local citizen in the global community, Kant responds to the isolated individual emerging in many Western societies. Faced with this seclusion, individual citizens identify with ever more belligerent nations that will grow increasingly aggressive toward one another and minority communities within their borders. Cosmopolitanism, then, seeks the blurring of these nation-state boundaries. David Held explains the underlying reasons for this when distinguishing citizen rights from human rights. For Held, "Citizenship rights embody a conception of empowerment that is strictly limited to the framework of the nation-state."[90] Human rights, by contrast, are universal, or global. What is *right* for one nation may not be *right* for another. This guarded provincialism is the same phenomenon that Benedict Anderson has so carefully traced in the formation of nations.[91] And Stephen Toulmin has traced the beginning of the end of the nation-state to 1914, the end of Modernity and the start of World War I.[92] Still, as we can clearly see in the modern world, nations have not dissolved. Growing increasingly weary of the danger of nation-state isolationism and acknowledging the

[90] David Held, *Democracy and the Global Order: From the Modern State to Cosmopolitan Governance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 223.
[91] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
[92] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (New York: The Free Press, 1990).

growing global economic market, then, Held acknowledges that any form of cosmopolitan democracy that might emerge must work within and across nations.[93] The argument remains, however, for cosmopolitan thinkers that all people must come to transcend their own provincialism in favor of a more sophisticated global citizenship. This all may be good and true but, one must ask, what happens to the local, democratic participation envisioned by Aristotle and Robert Dahl in an increasingly cosmopolitan world?

At the level of city and state politics, today's young adults may very well have become flaneurs. While observing and writing about the Paris arcades in the nineteenth century, German philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin became fascinated with the notion of flanerie, or strolling. Put simply, the flaneur, for Benjamin, was represented in the aimless strolling of the leisure class. In perhaps its most dramatic form, Benjamin notes in his Arcades Project that "In 1839 it was considered elegant to take a tortoise out walking. This gives us an idea of the tempo of flanerie in the arcades."[94] But what can such anecdotes tell us about people today? The flaneur of 19th century Paris and his counterpart today can best be understood in two ways. First, the flaneur is an idle observer, not an actor: "Basic to flanerie, among other things, is the idea that the fruits of idleness are more precious than the fruits of labor."[95] The point of flanerie is to stroll about without purpose or concern. Secondly, the flaneur is no joiner. Or as Zygmunt Bauman has more recently put it, "All strands of modern life seem to meet and tie

[93] David Held, "Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Global Order: A New Agenda," in *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, ed. James Bohman and Matthias Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1997).
[94] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (New York: Belknap Press, 2002).
[95] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, .

together in the pastime and the experience of the stroller: going for a stroll as one goes to a theatre, finding oneself among strangers and being a stranger to them (in the crowd but not of the crowd)."[96] The Flaneur, then, is one who walks about his local community without fully participating in that community. He is located in space but not in communal space.

To say that today's youth in the United States have become cosmopolitan is to say that they have taken their political concerns to a more global level but it may also be to say that they have become flaneurs, increasingly losing touch with a true polis. The problem here is one of distance. That is, the problems of peoples half way around the globe are easy to deal with because they require little personal effort. Fixing the AIDS epidemic in Africa requires little more than a check in the mailbox or the boycotting of products that exploit Africans. Such virtual actions may work for some issues, but it will only work for problems that have already reached a point of international attention. It is also to suggest that few people today are learning the skills needed to negotiate living in contiguous communities, the sorts of communities in which people actually live. According to the United States Census Bureau, over 70 percent of Americans were living in an urban area by 1970. By 2000, a little over 80 percent of Americans resided in metropolitan areas of at least 250,000 people or more.[97] The United States is, in short, a society of city-dwellers. People must still interact with their neighbors on the block.

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[96] Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist—Or a Short History of Identity, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Guy (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE, 1996), 26.

[97] The census bureau defines the term urban and metropolitan with the following criteria: encompassing a densely settled territory, which consists of: core census block groups or blocks that have a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile and surrounding census blocks that have an overall density of at least 500 people per square mile.

They shop in grocery stories around the corner. And they elect, or at least are governed by, a city council, mayors or city managers, and state and national representatives. If nothing else, people pay local taxes and drive on city-maintained roads. Their bodies exist, quite simply, in contiguous communities. But in what sorts of communities do their minds exist?

In a perfect world, the best outcome of the changes presented in this chapter might be found in the popular slogan and bumper sticker, "Think Globally, Act Locally." But the postmodern world is not perfect, and there is no real reason to believe that young people will suddenly begin re-engaging their local communities in the ways that Aristotle or Dahl envisioned. If the political communities with which they identify become increasingly globalized, it may be a good thing for international business but will it be, one must ask, a good thing for democracy?

CHAPTER FOUR

Becoming Removed

"The people of this country, not the special interest big money, should be the source of all political power."—Former Senator Paul Wellstone

One month after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1942, Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered his State of the Union Address. His main topic was the attack itself and America's entrance into World War II. Speaking of this move to war, Roosevelt offered the following argument:

> Production for war is based on men and women—the human hands and brains which collectively we call Labor. Our workers stand ready to work long hours; to turn out more in a day's work; to keep the wheels turning and the fires burning twenty-four hours a day, and seven days a week. They realize well that on the speed and efficiency of their work depend the lives of their sons and their brothers on the fighting fronts.[1]

Six decades later, terrorists hijacked four planes and used them as weapons to attack the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. On September 20, 2001, George W. Bush addressed the nation while standing before a joint session of Congress. During the address, Bush posed the following concern: "Americans are asking: What is expected of us?" In response to this question, Bush asked for Americans' "continued participation and confidence in the American economy."[2] Bush also told the American people that

[1] Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "State of the Union," January 6, 1942.
[2] George W. Bush, "Freedom at War with Fear," September 20, 2001.

"those who want to give can go to a central source of information, libertyunites.org." Both presidents understood that the American people needed to feel they could take action in response to an attack. Both men offered their suggestions. Roosevelt told the American people that they were needed in the factories; Bush told the American people they were needed at the mall. Roosevelt asked Americans to work hard and Bush asked them to consume avidly. Given this dramatic shift in tonality, this chapter asks: What happened in those sixty years? And, more importantly, what was its impact on citizenship in the United States?

Whereas Chapter Three examined where young people have located traditional spheres of political community, this chapter asks a related question: where do young people locate political power? That is, what forces do young people believe have the greatest potential to impact their community(ies) politically? After all, to be a citizen is to have the ability to exert power in one's community. In terms of traditional political science research, this is a question about political efficacy.

Over the past few decades, scholars have repeatedly noted an overall decline in people's confidence in their ability to change things, using four main survey items to measure an individual's efficaciousness: (1) "I don't think public officials care much what people like me think," (2) "Voting is the only way that people like me have any say about how government runs things," (3) "People like me don't have any say about what the government does," and (4) "Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated

that a person like me can't really understand what's going on."[3] While some researchers have questioned the validity of these measures and even offered alternative survey items to measure political efficacy,[4] the original research focus has held up rather well. Since the early 1970s, researchers have been finding evidence that fewer and fewer Americans feel they can make a difference.[5]

One central explanation researchers have used to explain declining levels of political efficacy is an overall decrease in social trust. Individuals' trust of people with whom they have little or no direct contact has been found to contribute to political participation.[6] Many researchers argue that this core belief raises suspicion about the motives of others and heightens concerns about others who are not pulling their weight—both major participation factors.[7] For example, Robert Putnam has shown that many people's belief in the honesty and moral soundness of others has steadily declined from a high of over 50 percent in 1952 to barely one-fourth of Americans at the turn of the century.[8] This decline has, moreover, coincided with the same trend in political efficacy. Social trust, then, may in fact be playing a role in people's retreat from political participation. But what has caused this general skepticism about civic possibilities?

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[3] A Campbell, G Gurin, and W E Miller, *The Voter Decides* (Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson and Company, 1954).
[4] See Stephen C. Craig, Richard G. Niemi, and Glenn E. Silver, "Political Efficacy and Trust: A Report on the NES Pilot Study System," *Political Behavior*, 12(1990), 289-314; and Michael E. Morrell, "Survey and Experimental Evidence for a Reliable and Valid Measure of Internal Political Efficacy," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 67 (2003), 589-602.
[5] See, for example, Arthur H. Miller, "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970," *American Political Science Review* 68 (1974), 951-972.
[6] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000), 139.
[7] Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity* (NewYork: Free Press, 1995); and Eric M. Uslaner, *Moral Foundations of Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[8] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*

Ronald Inglehart has argued that interpersonal trust has much to do with economic circumstances. In assessing what factors play key roles in constructing a stable democracy, Inglehart finds that interpersonal trust, economic development, and subjective well-being "are all part of a highly intercorrelated syndrome that might be called a 'prodemocratic culture.'"[9] Wendy Rahn and John Transue have conducted an analysis of twenty years of survey data collected from high school seniors and concluded that "the proper interpretation of the very strong time series correlation is that as materialism rises, social trust falls."[10] This study shows an important correlation but it does little to explain why this underlying trend has become manifest. Nor does it show, more importantly, what the ultimate outcome of this correlation may be for democratic citizenship writ large.

This chapter begins with the assumption that this perceived relationship is more complicated than research suggests. I begin with a discussion of late-capitalism and its relationship to the postmodern changes discussed in the previous chapter. Then I return to the high school newspapers represented in the study to discover how the economic shifts of the past several decades may have impacted the civic identities of America's youth. Put briefly, I offer three models of politically efficacious behavior that explain how Americans see the relationship between political and economic factors: networked conventionals, networked activists, and removed volunteers. In the end, I suggest that

[9] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 194.
[10] Wendy M. Rahn and John E. Transue, "Social Trust and Value Change: The Decline of Social Capital in American Youth, 1976-1995," *Political Psychology* 19(1998): 545-565.

while all three civic exemplars are valid, only one—removed volunteers—captures the predominant political behavior of young people today.

Postmodern Capitalism

Understanding the three models of civic engagement presented below requires, first, a brief explanation of how the postmodern shift has impacted the economic lives of the American people. To argue that Americans place a great deal of importance on capitalism and material goods may seem, at first glance, self-evident. Americans have long been concerned with money and its social display. Anyone who has ever read Thorstein Velben's 1899 *The Theory of the Leisure Class* or suffered through one of the many Henry James novels from the same period (e.g., *The Bostonians* or *The Portrait of a Lady*) knows full-well that the American people have been strikingly concerned with material wealth since the Gilded Age. And one can go back even further in time to sense America's fascination with wealth. It was, after all, Alexis de Tocqueville who noted the following in 1840: "Democracy favors the taste for physical pleasure. This taste, if it becomes excessive, soon disposes men to believe that nothing but matter exists. Materialism, in turn, spurs them on to such delights with mad impetuosity. Such is the vicious circle into which democratic nations are driven."[11] Given this long history, why spend even more time arguing that Americans place a great deal of importance on material gain today?

Karl Marx offers an initial answer. The United States, as a democratic institution, is rooted in the idea of a free capitalistic economic system. The founders, it has been

[11] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Trans.), (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

argued, were some of the earliest readers of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, with its emphasis on a self-interested free market system.[12] It was, in fact, Smith's own work that inspired Marx's critique of capitalism less than a century later. In his magnum opus, *Capital*, Marx outlines his primary concerns, including the necessary move to surplus and commodity fetishism. In the first concern, Marx pointed out that capitalism ineluctably drives society toward producing a surplus in both goods and labor, and it is in this surplus that the capitalist places value. As Marx notes, "The value of a commodity is, in itself, of no interest to the capitalist. What alone interests him, is the surplus value that dwells in it, and is realizable by sale."[13] Capitalism, then, drives the individual toward "excess" in production and labor and it is this excess that Marx finds particularly problematic.

For Marx, commodities have a "mystical character" that is not easily understood. Marx argues that the "fetishism of commodities has its origins…in the peculiar social character of the labour that produces them"[14] and the surplus production of labor is what drives this relationship. This relationship between labor and commodity does more, however, than simply create a mystical interconnectedness; the relationship produces something altogether unique and separate:

> When we bring the products of our labour into relation with each other as values, it is not because we see in these articles the material receptacles of homogeneous human labour. Quite the contrary: whenever, by an

[12] Samuel Fleischacker, "Adam Smith's Reception among the American Founders, 1776-1790," *The William and Mary Quarterly* October 2002 <http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/wm/59.4/fleischacker.html> (20 Feb. 2006).
[13] Karl Marx, "Capital," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert C. Tuccker, ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), 383.
[14] Marx, "Capital," 321.

> exchange, we equate as values our different products, by that very act, we also equate, as human labour, the different kinds of labour expended upon them. We are not aware of this, nevertheless we do it. Value, therefore, does not stalk about with a label describing what it is. It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic.[15]

Marx indicates here that commodities take on social value. The economic worth of a pair of pants, for example, shifts from functional use to fashion appeal. The pair of pants becomes a pair of People's Liberation jeans.[16]

Marx understands this shift as an act of fetishism, an obsession with the product's social value. Judith Williams argues, however, that the individual's relationship to commodities today is better understood as a desire:

> Marx talks of the commodity as 'congealed labour', the frozen form of a past activity; to the consumer it is also congealed longing, the final form of an active wish. And the shape in which fulfillment is offered seems to become the shape of the wish itself. The need for change, the sense that there must be something else, something different from the way things are, becomes the need for a new purchase, a new hairstyle, a new coat of paint. Consuming products does give a thrill, a sense of both belonging and being different, charging normality with the excitement of the unusual….The power of purchase—taking home a new thing, the

[15] Marx, "Capital," 322.
[16] At the time of this writing, People's Liberation jeans were one of the more trendy brands, selling for more than $200. That there name implies a democratic revolution from a totalitarian regime only adds to Marx's argument. And there are a number of these brands today—Seven for All Mankind, Citizens of Humanity, Rock & Republic and Free People.

> anticipation of unwrapping—seems to drink up the desire for something new, the restlessness and unease that must be engendered in a society where so many have so little power, other than to withdraw the labour which produces its prizes.[17]

While Marx is concerned with the individual's obsession with a product, Williams' worry is that this obsession becomes a desire that is difficult to fulfill. The pair of People's Liberation jeans is merely the latest manifestation of an always already advancing trend.

In desiring something, that is, one can also become obsessed with desire itself. Late-capitalism, then, moves one from object to act. Or as Frederic Jameson argues:

> What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation."[18]

This aestheticization of commodities for mass consumption is one of the key features of what Jameson refers to in the title of his seminal work—*Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Jameson argues that postmodern society came into being only after the consumer shortages of World War II were refilled or overfilled. Once this production had been accomplished, people went from being concerned about having the

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[17] Judith Williamson, *Consuming Passions: The Dynamics of Popular Culture* (London, Marion Boyars, 1988), 12-13.
[18] Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 4-5.

goods they needed to live to being concerned about how much of, and which kinds of, goods they would consume.

It is this changing process from *need* to *want* that helps distinguish citizenship as community responsibility from citizenship as consumer preference. Or as Zygmunt Bauman has put it, "postmodern society engages its members primarily in their capacity as consumers rather than producers."[19] And this focus on consumption subtly alters one's senses of community, politics, and citizenship. Bauman makes this clear when he writes that, "Life organized around consumption…must do without norms: it is guided by seduction, ever rising desires and volatile wishes—no longer by normative regulation. No particular 'Joneses' offer a reference point for one's own successful life; a society of consumers is one of universal comparison—and the sky is the only limit."[20] A citizen has a natural outward focus on others and the community, but a consumer's focus is on his or her self. The latter's emphasis is problematic for democratic principles.

Bauman's assertion that we have moved completely into a postmodern society that engages people as consumers may be a little overstated, but there is plenty of reason to believe that the lines between citizen and consumer have been increasingly stretched thin. If nothing else, the economic changes of late-capitalism have altered how many people engage the political sphere. Understanding how this evolution has impacted young people and their civic identities is the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

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[19] Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 76. See also Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).
[20] Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 76.

Networked Conventionals

At the end of the 1900's, the political system in the United States was, by many accounts, cobbled together by political parties and corruption. Individuals did not vote according to political issues but according to party affiliations, which were often paid for by local party bosses. Politics was most certainly a passionate enterprise but it was not a serious one for most citizens. The Progressive Movement sought to change that. According to Michael Schudson:

> Progressive Era politics instructed people in a citizenship of intelligence rather than passionate intensity. Political participation became less a relationship to party than a relationship to the state, less a connection to community than to principles and issues. The voter who kept up with the news read less to bask in the glow of his party's achievements than to peruse reports on the various issues, politicians, and parties of the day.[21]

These changes created what Schudson refers to as the age of the informed citizen. The possibility for the informed citizen to emerge came from several progressive movement policies including the secret ballot, stricter campaign regulations, and an emphasis on the Constitution as an educational instrument. Today, this model of citizenship is one that many scholars promote since it highlights a network of citizens working together as voters and places political power in the hands of conventional political institutions.

While Schudson argues that a new rights-based citizenship began to emerge in the 1960s, the *networked conventional* still serves as a civic archetype today. Simply put, the

[21] Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 182.

networked conventional's primary duties as citizen are to stay informed about political issues and to cast a ballot in each election. He is networked since his concern with political information keeps him abreast of his community and its troubles. He is conventional because he believes that the community and its institutions offer the best opportunity for fixing problems. Personal issues remain largely a private matter and work is about being a productive laborer. And as Schudson notes, this model of citizenship has been waning.

Beginning with the late sixties, one finds the last vestiges of the networked conventional in both young peoples' attitudes toward political problems and voting. In the early years of this study, in fact, most political and social problems that young people encountered were discussed in terms of their impact on the community. Even a problem like parking became an issue about what it means to act as a good member of the community, as the following excerpt from a 1967 article demonstrates:

> There is a possibility that Oakies will not have to purchase parking stickers in the future. Mr. Little explained that if students would treat a car as a means of transportation only, there would be no reason for any student to pay a parking fee. He added if the students would drive with courtesy and not interfere with the bus or pedestrian traffic there would be no need for parking regulations….There is always the 5% who take advantage of the freedoms offered the student body as a whole. This

> minority acts in such a childish manner as to sometimes cause the privileges of the rest of the students to be revoked.[22]

The issue here of parking stickers and restrictions is not a financial matter; it is, instead, an issue of acting responsibly. Four decades later, a similar issue was discussed with no reference to collective responsibility. In an April 2005 article at Lamar High School, the issue of having your car towed is discussed primarily in fiduciary terms:

> In the program, once the police are notified of a stranded car, the cops authorize towing from Houston TranStar and call a tow truck. The first tow truck driver that spots the problem will ask the police for permission to tow the car away. The cost of the towing is $75 for the first five miles and $1.50 for each additional mile. If a car needs to be stored it will cost $40 for the first day and $15 for each additional day. If the costs are not paid, the car will be sold at auction after 61 days. The "six minute rule" that goes along with the Safe Clear program states that a person has six minutes to "fix" his car, or their car will be towed….With a large number of Lamar students hitting the road every day, it is very important that they all know the rules—and how to fix a flat in under six minutes![23]

The students at Lamar High School today do not share the community concerns of the earlier generation in Kansas City. They are seemingly not worried about what is best for others. They are focused instead on the financial and individual impact of the new policy.

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[22] No Parking Stickers Required in Future?, *The Northmen's Log*, September 22, 1967.
[23] Towing: Is your car safe?, *Lamar Life*, April 2005.

A similar shift can be seen in students' attitude toward voting. The networked conventional is quite serious about becoming informed. This is especially true for the students in the earliest years of this study. At Oak Park High School in 1968, one student exemplified this attitude when lionizing the informed young person: "Students all over the United States are more involved in the modern world of politics than any nation's youth has ever been…A citizen of the United States can't vote until he's 21. He can, though, influence others, if he's well informed and interested."[24] And as late as 1980, one finds that the students at Wilson High School in Washington D.C. believed in the sheer sanctity of voting:

> We, the Beacon staff, encourage active involvement in the election. We believe everyone that has registered and is of age should vote, not just because it's the American thing to do or because it makes them feel like they have a heavy responsibility which they want to prove they can handle, but because they should care….The Beacon staff reiterates their belief that those who can should vote, and should choose the man who best stand for what they believe.[25]

While these examples offer a glimpse of how things used to be for many students, the 1990's shifted things abruptly. Even a student encouraging his peers to vote presents this difference when mocking those trying to get young people involved: "If we voted maybe television networks would cancel shows like "rock the Vote" and we will not have to

[24] "Youth Tackles Politics," *The Northmen's Log*, September 27, 1968.
[25] "Go Ahead, Vote!", *The Beacon*, October 1980.

listen to so called 'stars' tell us to vote when they probably haven't voted themselves."[26] And at Newton South High School in Boston, one student exhibits great frustration with her peers' political ignorance:

> The United States boasts more newspapers than any other nation, yet we refuse to make use of them. Ignorance of events, both domestic and international, has become the norm. We know the press does little to better the situation by insisting that more meaningful events take a backseat to thin, synthetic, and glamorous stories. But is it entirely the fault of the media? The problem is that people look to newspapers as a source of entertainment. Conveying information is no longer the real purpose of a newspaper. Instead, the main concern is entertaining the public, a dangerous shift in focus.[27]

In the end, this student offers little hope of getting her fellow youth informed, let alone voting.

While these examples show the lessened concern for institutional politics, they do not explain why the shift occurred. To understand that, one must get a sense of how much more young people emphasize materialism today than they did just thirty or forty years before. The clearest way to see this difference is to simply compare the number of articles that deal with financial issues across the years. Looking at the *Ram Page* from Phoenix, Arizona, for example, even a casual observer can see the change. In the six-page December 9, 1965, edition of the school's newspaper, one finds only a single article

[26] "Use the power that's rightly yours, vote in '92," *The Grantonian*, October 16, 1992.
[27] "Apathy of Americans leaves them clueless," *Denebola*, October 30, 1998.

that deals with financial matters, and it is an article about a local community fundraising project. After explaining that a number of groups in Phoenix have been working to save local landmark Camelback Mountain from erosion, the article reported that "the teenagers are also contributing to this project in their own way. The high schools have their own committees, which will try to earn the most money for the project. The high school which earns the most money will be awarded an engraved plaque."[28] Apart from this one article, the only other reference to fiscal issues is to the cost of a ticket for the winter formal--$2.50.[29] In late 1965, the students of Washington High School were not consumed with pocketbook issues.

Moving ahead almost forty years, one finds how much materialism has come to dominate the lives of American youth. The 12-page December 19, 2002 issue of the *Rampage* had seven articles dealing directly with financial issues:

- Universities Raise Tuition
- Purple Nets Prize—reporting a student's monetary prize from an M&M's contest
- Check Your Checks—about fees at the school's book store
- Looking at Head-to-toe Fashions—including references to a number of brands
- 'Tis the Season to Go Shopping
- Bobby Mirandas 1967 Chevy Impala—focusing on the value of his remodeled car
- Starvation in Some Places, Obesity in Others—discussing the global economic divide[30]

[28] "WHS students support 'Save Camelback' fund," *Ram Page*, December 3, 1965, p.1.
[29] "'Marshmallow Winter' title of Xmas formal," *Ram Page*, December 3, 1965, p. 1.
[30] All of these articles can be found in the December 19, 2002 *Rampage*.

In addition to these seven articles, even an article on a canned food drive was reduced to the monetary. Reporting on the winners of the recent contest, the paper reported that the winning class owed its success to three seniors "who alone brought in over 3,000 cans and spent almost $140."[31] Regardless of what they are talking about—world hunger, cars, or Christmas—today's young adults are overwhelmingly concerned with what things are worth and how one's wealth should be displayed. There is, however, more going on in the lives of today's young people than simple awareness of monetary influences.

Nowhere is young Americans' complex attitude towards materialism more apparent than in the area of fashion. Clothes and style have long been important to many in the United States, with Benjamin Franklin noting the importance of dressing for success,[32] and Thurstein Veblen pointing out America's love of showing off their new found wealth more than a hundred years ago.[33] Over the past four decades, however, American youth have come to see fashion as a symbol of individual selfhood and small group identity.

The young adults of the late 1960s and early 1970s were also concerned with such matters but the fashion articles that made it into these earlier newspapers were marked primarily by two issues—questions about what is socially proper and the irrelevance of brand names. A 1966 article in the *Ram Page* written by a male explicitly makes this point when arguing that the female fashions of the time were not "suited" for Phoenix

[31] "Cans Collected," *Rampage*, December 19, 2002.
[32] Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985).
[33] Thorstein B. Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994).

girls.[34] In a 1967 front page article in *The Lancer*, one fashion reporter wrote about what was proper for the successful man heading off to college. While talking of dark suits, vests, overcoats and umbrellas, the article clearly prompted young men to opt for a traditional look.[35] And while the article did discuss fabric materials and costs, there was no mention of name brands or even of specific retailers.

One article from a 1971 issue of *The Grantonian* that argued for individual choice in clothing took the first half of the article to discuss what proper clothing is for young people. After discussing female teachers wearing pants, the article concluded that "there have been questions whether these [pants] are proper or not but the final analysis is left up to the individual."[36] No brands were mentioned in the article, with the emphasis being placed on not pressuring people to adopt specific fashion choices. Even an article in *The Northmen's Log* emphasizing the "Twiggy" fad avoided discussing the new clothing style materialistically, choosing instead to talk more broadly about the style's universality: "The wild, wild, way out stripes are one of the biggest evidences of the "Twiggy" look at Oak Park this year. All sizes and shapes of girls are seen in all styles and varieties of the many new creations of the Twiggy fashion plate."[37] These early articles primarily focused on the functional quality of the products described.

For high school students in the 1980s and onward, clothing as a social marker took on a whole new meaning with young people increasingly regarding material goods

[34] Current girls' fashions ridiculous, *Ram Page*, January 31, 1966.
[35] Vests, Umbrellas Big With 'Traditional Look,' *The Lancer*, November 9, 1967.
[36] Past and present fashion parallel seen in 'do your thing' clothing approach, *The Grantonian*, February 12, 1971.
[37] Wild Stripes Lead Latest 'Twiggy' Fad, *The Northmen's Log*, September 22, 1967.

as an outward sign of a particular lifestyle, a notion that becomes something of a politics in and of itself. As Mike Featherstone argues:

> Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle.[38]

Featherstone's comments point to the shift found in young people—the new heroes of consumer culture. From such a perspective, clothing is no longer simply fashionable but an outward sign of a particular lifestyle and, hence, of a particular politics. That is, lifestyle becomes the social packaging one uses to gain power within one's groups and to distance oneself from others via branding.[39] Lifestyle becomes a group identifier and, therefore, an integral part of community life.

For the young people in this study, such a move to a lifestyle of consumerism could not be more apparent. By 1984, these trends can already be detected at Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington D.C. An article about two young designers appearing in the October issue opened by asserting as simple fact that "many teenagers thrive on purchasing fashionable and expensive clothing." The article then moved on to

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[38] Featherstone, *Consumer Culture & Postmodernism*, (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 1991), 87.

[39] While I do not closely examine the way that marketers have taken up branding as a way to sell an image rather than a product, it is worth noting here that branding may be a integral part of the change described below. For further analysis of this trend see Naomi Klein, No Logo. Particularly connected to the current argument is Klein's assertion that "The astronomical growth in the wealth and cultural influence of multinational corporations over the last fifteen years can arguably be traced back to a single, seemingly innocuous idea developed by management theorists in the mid-1980s: that successful corporations must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products."

discuss the students' work at a local designer, Satiny, by focusing on their source of inspiration—brands such as Calvin Klein, Giorgio Armani, and Perry Ellis. After exploring the career hopes of the two designers, the article ends with the following: "Regardless of the direction that their careers take them, John and Steve will almost certainly have careers in fashion. Don't be surprised if you are wearing Sullivan jeans and a Fitzgerald jacket in a few years."[40] The matter-of-fact tone here is striking and its point quite clear. As early as the 1980s, young people in the United States had already begun to internalize a fetish for fashion and style. The trend towards consumerism expanded exponentially thereafter.

Wherever one looks in the high school newspapers studied here, fashion becomes an increasingly important material aspect of young people's lives. From a fashion show fundraiser at Grant High School in Portland[41] to a discussion of how different types of students—goths, skaters, and preps—should dress,[42] the need for students to understand and engage in commodity fetishism could not be clearer. And those who seem to engage in the highest level of fashion get the most rewards. In Phoenix, for instance, the *Rampage* offers its readers some of the latest winter fashions by including in their four pictures the "Senior class president [who] is flaunting his look a like Justin Timberlake jacket from Gap for a whoppin $185," and "Senior [basketball star who] is sporting his Chicago Bulls warm-ups. He purchased them from the Sports Cage for $75."[43] The student president gets two points for being cool since his jacket is both from the Gap

[40] "Promising Designers Emerge from Satiny," *The Beacon*, October 1984.
[41] "Fashion Show Comes to Grant June 11," *The Grantonian*, June 10, 1999.
[42] "Student reviews fashion trends throughout the school," *The Carrickulum*, February 5, 1997.
[43] "Brrrr….It's cold out here! Warm up in style," *Rampage*, January 18, 2002.

clothing store and also connected to a major popular culture idol, while the basketball star is praised for wearing an iconic symbol of his sport. Each student is represented as being successful in school and hence an individual worthy of emulation. During the following school year, the new class president gets similar attention by being presented as a model for an article on head-to-toe fashion, wearing a "trendy Guess shirt" and a pair of Kenneth Cole shoes.

Nowhere is this sense of commodity fetishism more apparent, however, than in Houston's Lamar High School. As mentioned in chapter two, that school's newspaper had moved to a magazine format in the fall of 2003, and this colorful and glossy approach brings fashion to an all-new level. In the Winter 2004 edition of the magazine, *Lamar Life*, one finds a two-page spread on fashion. On the left page is an interview with a local student who has begun designing his own t-shirts (which consists of buying solid-colored shirts and hand-painting them). The right page offers a short article on women's fall fashions accompanied by ample pictures of new clothes and their respective prices. These pictures include an Abercrombie & Fitch Renee Houndstooth Pea Coat for $149, a Gap Boucle Wrap Coat for $128, and a Banana Republic Pave Flower Brooch for $38.[44] The Spring 2004 issue follows suit by presenting another two-page spread offering fashion tips for girls on one page and guys on the other.[45] The Summer 2005 issue, however, pushes these matters even further with a four-page color spread on summer fashion. These pages include nine pictures and no more than sixty words. One of the most poignant pictures presents all seven student-models in front of a green wall. Sitting

[44] His Own Style, *Lamar Life*, Winter 2004.
[45] Spring Into Fashion, *Lamar Life*, Spring 2004.

down in the center of the picture are the three black males, two of whom have Asian girls sitting in their laps, and two Caucasian blondes are standing above the group in sexually suggestive poses.[46] The picture suggests a multi-racial orgy of consumer fetishism filled with sexual tension and high style. These are clearly young people offering a repackaged image of the consumer world that has captured them, and they are doing so for the benefit of their peers.

The young adults represented in this study are clearly overwhelmed by consumerism. Their personal choices in the area of fashion are particularly salient to how they conceive of group identity and the power dynamics in the schools themselves. Neoliberals and fashion designers might well be proud of having helped produce a consumer force of over 32 million teenagers by the turn of the century, a force that spends more than 100 billion dollars a year on themselves. Community activists, however, may be less optimistic about this trend since it coincides with decreasing levels of political participation.

Networked Activists

There is a sense among many Americans that political power in the United States has become too concerned with money. According to some, this is especially true of young people. In a 1999 *Atlantic Monthly* cover story, Ted Halstead argued, for instance, that young people today "would like to see bold steps taken to get money out of politics."[47] This seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. In the 2004 presidential election, President George W. Bush and Senator John Kerry spent a combined 655

[46] Summer Fashion, *Lamar Life*, Summer 2005.
[47] Ted Halstead, "A Politics for Generation X," *The Atlantic Monthly* (August 1999).

million dollars, five and a half times the amount spent in 1976 by Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford. And in the 2004 South Dakota senate race, Tom Daschle and John Thune raised more than $37 million, or about 100 dollars per vote cast. Political campaigning today is big business. But the relationship between politics and economics runs deeper still. According to a number of researchers, many young adults have become especially aware of such political/economic relationships and have begun to confront this locus of power as *networked activists*, as groups responding to the pressures of a material and corporate pressures. Is this research correct?

According to political scientists Wendy Rahn and John Transue, young people in the United States have increasingly lost trust in politics and placed it on enlightened consumerism instead.[48] Borrowing a conceptual definition that sees materialism as a "set of centrally held beliefs about the importance of possession in one's life,"[49] they argue that an important value shaping youth's attitudes toward others is "characterized by the conjunction of nontraditional values with consumption-oriented values."[50] Through an analysis of time-series survey data, Rahn and Transue find that American youth have rather quickly adopted a more materialistic view of the world, a view that has altered their value systems and caused them to lose trust in others. Young people, according to this argument, have begun to see the social world through the competitive lenses of late-capitalism.

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[48] Wendy M. Rahn and John Transue, Social Trust and Value Change: The Decline of Social Capital in American Youth, 1976-1995, *Political Psychology*, 19, 1998, 545-565.
[49] Marsha Richins and Scott Dawson, A consumer values orientation for materialism and its measurement: Scale development and validation, *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, 1992, 303-316.
[50] Rahn and Transue, "Social Trust," 550.

In his Ithiel De Sola Pool Lecture at the 1998 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Lance Bennett agrees with Rahn's assertion that materialism is on the rise, arguing that even a casual observer can see "a sharp rise in the importance of money, especially among recent generations that have exhibited the greatest civic engagement."[51] Bennett disagrees, however, as to why this is the case:

> A more complex view of the rising importance of money among successive generations of youth must also include the increasing employment dislocation that they have experienced. To an important degree, the rise in materialism—particularly as indicated by the concern for having lots of money—may be a highly realistic response to uncertain economic conditions.[52]

For Bennett, younger generations of Americans have been faced with an increasingly uncertain economic system and their materialistic values merely reflect their senses of insecurity. Young people, it seems, have placed greater importance on the accumulation of material objects. For today's youth, money matters most.

It is no wonder, then, that young people have come to see the political world more often as a place to be dealt with through financial means. This, Michele Michelletti argues, is a confusion of traditional political concerns with consumer demand and choice:

> There is…a politics of consumer products, which for growing numbers of people implies the need to think politically privately. This politicizes what

[51] W. Lance Bennett, "The UnCivic Culture: Communication, Identity, and the Rise of Lifestyle Politics," *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 31(4), 1998, 740-761.
[52] Ibid., 751.

> we have traditionally conceived as private consumer choice and erases the division between the political and economic spheres. People who view consumer choice in this fashion see no border between the political and economic spheres. For them, the market is an arena for politics. They also believe that their private choices have political consequences. They see an interconnectedness of their private and public acts. It is no longer possible for them to make a sharp distinction between the virtues most important only for politics, community, or private life. Everyday conduct of individual citizens is not just a matter for private life but increasingly important from the local to the global level for politics, community, and the character of the marketplace.[53]

According to Michelletti, individuals no longer differentiate political concerns from consumer concerns. This relationship may, however, be causing negative outcomes. Lance Bennett cautions that those who see social relationships through "material values often find government and conventionally organized politics distant and hard to engage. From the standpoint of government and elected representatives, personalized and diverse citizen expectations are increasingly hard to satisfy."[54] Young people, that is, may feel alienated from more traditional forms of politics because of their increasingly financial character.

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[53] Michele Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping: Individuals, Consumerism, and Collective Action* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 2.

[54] W. Lance Bennett, "Lifestyle Politics and Citizen Consumers: Identity, Communication and Political Action in Late Modern Society," in *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, ed. John Corner and Dick Pels (London: SAGE, 2003) 137-150.

Arguing that young people in the United States have overwhelmingly become consumers and that they have come to see political problems and issues through a financial lens, prompts the question of whether or not they are aware of the pressures of late capitalism. Do today's youth, in fact, understand that they are being pressed into materialism? The answer is yes.

American youth of the past twenty years have become quite familiar with the pressures to consume. In a number of articles, the students in this study openly discussed these pressures. As one student wrote in a December 2001 article at Carrick High School in Pittsburgh, young people know they are being targeted as consumers by credit card companies:

> Instead of borrowing mom and dad's [credit card] you can have your own. It's a material world out there, and we are all material boys and girls….Credit card companies are targeting teenagers and college students to make their money. The younger generation has no idea what paying bills and working to stay afloat feels like. Our part time jobs turn into forty hours a week and our high school and college years are spent between school work, job work, and absolute stress.[55]

In this example, the student admits that young people are attracted to materialism, that they have to work hard to afford their lifestyles, and that the financial/consumer world is aware of young people as a marketing segment. Given that today's youngest generations

[55] Charging Head First into Debt, *The Carrickulum*, December 11, 2001.

are the most marketed-to generation ever,[56] it should be no surprise that they are starting to understand their role in the marketplace.

At Newton South High School in Boston, presumptions like these became especially obvious in the March 2005 issue. Under a large banner that reads "Selling Adolescence," the students on the *Denebola* devoted three pages to examining how young people are targeted as consumers. One article on how trends are poisoning their high school began by arguing that "Newton South High School cannot get enough of anything worn by a celebrity or with a brand name. These products are perpetuating the American stereotype of a stupid, gluttonous society, because all we do is waste our money and follow trends."[57] Another article explored why young people are so aggressively targeted by advertisers, pointing out that "it is estimated that teens spent $169 billion in 2004, a figure that includes both teens' own money as well as that given to them from their parents."[58] And a full page piece on ten of the coolest current trends hitting Newton South is filled with sarcasm. Referring to *The OC*, a popular television show about wealthy high school students in California, the article points out that "teens still can't get enough of watching the rich, privileged characters struggle through a life filled with angst, affairs, and alcohol." And referring to a popular new Gap vest, the article exclaims, "That's right--$120 for a jacket without sleeves!"[59] As this group of students writing in the *Denebola* are keenly aware, young people are being targeted by—and following the lead of—advertisers who will do anything for their money.

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[56] Neil Howe, William Strauss, and R.J. Matson, *Millennials Rising: the Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000).
[57] Warning: trends poison South, *Denebola*, March 24, 2005.
[58] Advertisers target profitable teen market, *Denebola*, March 24, 2005.
[59] 10 Trends You Love to Follow, *Denebola*, March 24, 2005.

To understand just how far this pressure goes, one need only look at newspaper coverage of proms. Proms have long been a major part of Spring life for high school juniors and seniors, but the attitude students have taken toward them has changed during the past forty years. With many proms taking place in school gyms with minimal expenditures, the prom typically offered itself as an end-of-the-year party for high school upperclassmen. A 1967 editorial in the *Denebola* illustrates this point when the writer argued that "the prospect of holding the Prom at the Meadows was heatedly discussed at several Class Committee meetings. It was argued that the type of Prom advocated would keep many students from attending due to a rise in cost. This would defeat the primary purpose of the Prom: To get the Whole class together for the final time."[60] And an article in the March 1969 issue of the *Ram Page* points out that the real purpose of the prom is to have fun and reminds students not to be overly indulgent.[61] For the students of the late 1960s and early 1970s then, the prom was concerned with bringing students together for pure enjoyment.

Over the years, prom has changed in character. Most high schools no longer hold their dances in the gym and most students end up spending a fair amount on dresses, tuxedos, limousines, and five-star meals. As sociologist Amy Best has argued, proms have become an important financial event for students, schools and communities.[62] Their importance today as a fashion show cannot be denied and students have begun to feel the pressures. As the following headlines demonstrate, whenever news coverage of the prom

[60] V.P. pacifies, *Denebola*, March 13, 1967.
[61] Prom fashions vary in style, cost, color, *Ram Page*, March 21, 1969.
[62] Amy L. Best, *Prom Night: Youth, Schools and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

appears in the more recent newspapers, it is accompanied by at least one piece questioning its cost:

- Bankruptcy court maybe in near future for seniors[63]
- The perfect Prom: At what price?[64]
- Prom dollars: What can you afford to spend for memories? Is it all worth the money?[65]
- Is $1,000 too much to ask for ONE night of fun?[66]
- Facing up to prom PRESSURE[67]

As all of these headlines demonstrate, today's high school students are aware of the party's soaring cost and pressures. What is not so clear is whether they believe they can do anything about it. While they may be aware of the problem, do they have the political efficacy needed to fight back?

The average individual is, indeed, faced with a growing number of choices that conflate his or her role as citizen and consumer. If a woman walks into a local coffee shop and finds two coffees on the menu—regular Columbian supreme and a 100% organic fair trade—she *may* find her consumption habits (buying the cheaper Columbian coffee) in conflict with her political values (fighting the inequality of globalization), instincts she may share with other cosmopolitan citizens. In seeing her choice this way, she becomes a networked activist, a persona that *may* give her a sense of efficacy. In any

[63] "Bankruptcy court maybe in near future for seniors," *Carrickulum*, June 15, 1994.
[64] "The Perfect Prom: At What Price?," *Rampage*, May 10, 1995.
[65] "Prom Dollars," *Rampage*, May 2, 1997.
[66] "Is $1,000 too much for ONE night of fun?," *Carrickulum*, May 23, 2000.
[67] "Facing up to prom PRESSURE," *The Northmen's Log*, April 19, 2002.

event, her decision is not based on her need for a caffeinated, hot beverage. She must also contend with multiple desires that underscore the postmodern shift of late-capitalism. While her proto-political action is laudable, is it the norm for today's youth?

According to a number of recent political and communication scholars, young people have begun to take on a more direct consumerist approach toward the political world around them. Today's youth are said to be demanding more from their governmental and corporate-run communities in much the same way that consumers are demanding better products and services. As Lance Bennett argues, across a whole range of relations with the state, citizens now take a more explicitly consumerist stance, expecting more direct benefits and fewer collective goods, and demanding more choice in education, health care, and other areas of state services."[68] More active examples of political consumerism would be, according to Bennett, the WTO protests in Seattle, boycotting Nike products due to their use of sweatshops, and the direct lobbying of Microsoft by a large network of computer users for better product standards. Bennett agrees with other researchers who have argued that young people have increasingly pulled out of traditional political action, suggesting that "when our political lens moves out beyond government, we find new forms of political expression taking shape that often channel individual identifications into surprisingly large-scale activities."[69] Included in

[68] W. Lance Bennett, "Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship," in *Politics, Products, and Markets: Exploring Political Consumerism Past and Present*, ed. Michele Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal, and Dietlind Stolle (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 103.
[69] W. Lance Bennett, "Lifestyle Politics and Citizen Consumers: Identity, Communication and Political Action in Late Modern Society," in *Media and the Restyling of Politics*, ed. John Corner and Dick Pels (London: SAGE, 2003) 137-150.

these activities is the belief that many young adults now act as highly politicized consumers.

As Michele Michelletti defines it, political consumerism is the "consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices."[70] And Lizabeth Cohen has referred to these same types of activity through her notion of the consumer's republic.[71] Both authors assume that many people—particularly today's consumer-savvy youth—have begun to bypass the old channels of governmental intervention in political matters. Citizens seeking to impact their communities go straight to the source of power—the corporations and financial institutions that are polluting the air, failing to provide health care and fair wages to labor, and suppressing the free speech of labor unions. These actions are primarily taking place through boycotts, buycotts, and individual consumer choice. The individual who consciously chooses to buy American-made products is, from their perspective, acting as a political consumer. So too is the individual who decides against buying a Liz Claiborne sweater for fear of supporting the company's use of sweat shops in third-world countries.

For many scholars, there is a built-in sense of efficacy for the political consumer. Anthony Giddens has, for instance, argued that the buying power and inherent choices associated with consumerism are emancipatory.[72] And a number of scholars see this emancipation as natural. Margaret Scammell takes up the argument with a matter-of-factness when arguing that "the act of consumption is becoming increasingly suffused

[70] Micheletti, *Political Virtue and Shopping*, xiv.
[71] Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).
[72] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

with citizenship [which] is not dead, or dying, but found in new places, in life-politics…and in consumption. The site of citizens' political involvement is moving from the production side of the economy to the consumption side."[73] And Micheletti and her colleagues have argued that political consumerism is quite natural in that it allows individuals to act through a "consumer choice of producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices."[74] And still others take the argument further to include more activist-type consumer actions, contending that "When people engage in boycotts or 'buycotts' with the aim of using the market to vent their political concerns, they are said to engage in the act of political consumerism."[75] All of these arguments rest on the assumption that one can act politically through consumerism and that the networked activist can thereby have real impact.

While networked activism may indeed be on the rise in some quarters, there is very little textual evidence to suggest that young people in the United States are part of this trend. Of the seven school newspapers examined in this study, only two discussed how students can respond to societal problems as political consumers—*Denebola*, from Boston's Newton South High School, and *The Grantonian*, from Portland's Grant High School. At Newton South High School, the students discussed such issues as eating at local restaurants instead of at national chain restaurants[76] to working collectively as a

[73] Margaret Scammell, "The Internet and Civic Engagement: The Age of the Citizen Consumer," *Political Communication 17* (2000): 351-355.
[74] Michele Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal, and Dietlind Stolle, "Introduction," *Politics, Products, and Markets: Exploring Political Consumerism Past and Present* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2004), ix-xxvi. P. x
[75] Dietlind Stolle, Marc Hooghe, and Michele Micheletti, "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation, *International Political Science Review* (2005): 245-269.
[76] "Small Mac?," *Denebola*, October 31, 2003

school to escape the pressures of wearing expensive, brand-name clothing.[77] The students at Grant Park High School have offered ideas for political consumers that included shopping at locally owned movie theaters instead of larger chains,[78] not shopping at all on the day after Thanksgiving (what they refer to as Buy Nothing Day),[79] and Nike's use of sweatshops.[80] While these articles clearly point to a sense of networked activism, they do no constitute a trend. After all, Newton South High School is in the Newton Centre suburb of Boston, one of the wealthiest and most liberal areas of a left-leaning city. Grant High School sits in the heart of Portland, Oregon, surrounded by a counter-culture of local shops, breweries, and cultural diversity. Newton South and Grant High students are clearly familiar with the networked activism that Lance Bennett and others have found to be on the rise, but these notions have not sunk deep roots in the nation as a whole or, at least, not among the young people studied here.

Removed Volunteers

Given that networked conventionals seem to have largely disappeared and that networked activists are more the exception than the norm, what type of politically engaged model does one find among today's youth? From what I can tell, they seem to have become a generation of *removed volunteers*. The young adults of the past twenty years have adopted two primary outlets for political engagement: donating goods or money and volunteering in various organizations.

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[77] "Materialism embedded in student clothing," *Denebola*, February 7, 2004.
[78] "Local low cost theaters fit any student's budget," *The Grantonian*, September 26, 2003.
[79] "Businesses won't cash in on BND," *The Grantonian*, November 21, 2003.
[80] "Sweatshops dehumanize employees," *The Grantonian*, February 27, 2004.

Most problems that might once have been dealt with through representative political action are now handled by collecting goods and donations. Young people in high schools around the country have long engaged in fundraising activities for a number of causes. At Grant High School in Portland, Oregon, for instance, a 1965 article praised the students at the school for raising over $1,000 dollars for the United Good Neighbor Drive.[81] In Phoenix, Arizona during the same year, the *Ram Page* reported that close to $200 had been added to the Student Council treasury during a workday drive by two students who earned the money "by waxing a semi-truck, washing windows, washing a car, cleaning pipe and trimming shrubbery."[82] And in Washington, D.C., the students at Wilson High School decided to sell school buttons and pom-poms to raise money for pep rally decorations instead of turning to the school's administration or local school board.[83] While all three of these examples highlight students raising money to benefit their organizations, these students are not giving their own money nor are they working individually.

Throughout the next two decades of this study, young people continue to raise money for school organizations and local causes. The holiday season becomes a particularly important time to do so. While the trend continues into the present, a new form of political action emerges in the 1990s—students giving money directly to support causes. In October of 2000, *The Northmen's Log* reported, for instance, that Oak Park High School had raised well over $5,000 for United Way and that much of this came

[81] "Goal Attained as Drive Ends," *The Grantonian*, October 15, 1965.
[82] "SC Workday nets $138: Kuch, Hall top earners," *Ram Page*, October 29, 1965.
[83] "Pepsters Sell Rah-Rah Paraphernalia," *The Beacon*, October 15, 1965.

directly from students who contributed "money to the administrator's bucket they most wanted to see wear one of the ugly thrift store outfits" that had been donated for the fundraising.[84] And at Grant High School, students were expected to pay $8 a ticket for a benefit concert that was created in 2003 to help fund the Grant High School Foundation, which helped "buy back teacher salaries that [had] been eliminated by the budget cuts."[85] In Portland, students even gave money to help pay for their own teachers.

The tendency of young people to donate money for political purposes was especially apparent following major tragedies. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, for example, the students at Washington High School in Phoenix responded with the following front page headline: "WHS family unites for terror victims: School fundraisers net over $3,000."[86] Whatever else the students might have been doing as citizens in response to 9-11, they were definitely acting with their wallets. Inside the same issue and directly beneath a factual accounting of the terrorist attacks, students were given the names and numbers to eight different organizations to whom they can make donations, from the New York Firefighters Fund and the Red Cross, to the National Disaster and Search Dog Foundation where students were told they can go online and "donate to assist in buying booties for the search and rescue dogs to help them walk in the glass and rubble." The same emphasis can be found at Oak Park High School in Kansas City, where students were told that the average student could get involved in one of four ways: (1) Gladfest Donations through which anyone could pay to have a friend

[84] "United Way succeeds again," *The Northmen's Log*, October 27, 2000.
[85] "Grant fundraiser concert tonight," *The Grantonian*, March 14, 2003.
[86] "WHS family unites for terror victims: School fundraises net over $3,000," *The Rampage*, October 5, 2001.

"arrested", (2) the online donation services provided at Helping.org, (3) the more direct online contribution site september11fund.org, and (4) by donating blood.[87] And at Lamar High School, an article on the Tsunami in Asia offered a recounting of individuals who had made contributions: "The tsunami even has some of the hottest rock and action stars donating money to help the victims. Rock/Rap group Linkin Park gave $100,000, action star Jackie Chan gave $65,000, Sandra Bullock gave $1 million, and Michael Dell donated $1 million. HISD raised over $135,000." The story ends by offering the hope that these donations are just the beginning of the needed philanthropy and then offers a list of websites and organizations for further contributions.[88] These students are not being asked to help *raise* money from others. They are being asked to *give* of their own resources, thereby conflating financial and political activity.

In short, America's youth have increasingly become accustomed to using their own resources to solve political and community problems—both at the micro and macro levels. The instinct to do so should come as no surprise since almost half of all seniors graduating in 2004 reported they were working.[89] Today's youth are both more likely to work than previous generations of young adults and to view themselves as tactical consumers.

It would be wrong, however, to assume that America's high school students have eschewed involvement in their communities in non-monetary ways. Today's young people have also become involved in community volunteering. No longer content to let

[87] "Getting Involved: Ways the average Oakie can do their part," *The Northmen's Log*, October 5, 2001.
[88] "Tsunami: In Asia," *Lamar Life*, April 2005.
[89] According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, 46.6 percent of all graduating seniors in 2004 were part of the civilian work force: www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.t01.htm.

the government take care of the poor (and with the decline in the modern welfare state in the United States), America's youth have sometimes stepped in to fill the void. Two articles in the May 12, 2000 issue of *The Rampage*, for instance, discuss the importance of volunteering and how rewarding it can be for the individual.[90] One of the articles also mentions the practical side of volunteering—that it might help a student earn a scholarship for college.[91] An article in *The Northmen's Log* in the fall of 2001 makes a similar point by arguing that students have gained insight and awareness through volunteering.[92] The students at Carrick High School in Pittsburgh have also found volunteering at the local food drive to be a rewarding way of benefiting their communities: "There is nothing like the feeling that someone engages in when they are able to lend a helping hand to someone less fortunate than themselves."[93] Even the young activists at Grant High School report that "if you've been looking for an activity that is fun, doesn't have to take a lot of time and makes you—and others—feel good, get out there and start volunteering."[94] And the benefits of volunteering have also not been lost on the wealthy students at Newton South, who argue that "there are many benefits of doing community service. The one that consistently keeps students involved in what they do is the satisfaction they get from seeing how their work improves the lives of others."[95] While some of these students may be volunteering because of the recent service-learning

[90] "Seniors experience giving at local homeless shelter," *The Rampage*, May 12, 2000.
[91] "Students scramble for summer volunteering, camps," *The Rampage*, May 12, 2000.
[92] "More than just once a year," *The Northmen's Log*, November 30, 2001.
[93] "Giving a helping hand to those less fortunate," *The Carrickulum*, December 15, 1997.
[94] "Volunteering builds character, resume," *The Grantonian*, October 18, 2002.
[95] "Community Service," *Denebola*, October 5, 1997.

push in public education, the students writing in their high school newspapers also see volunteerism as personally rewarding.

The long-term trends of volunteering may not be so positive, however. Over the past fifteen years, a number of researchers have identified the possibilities of service-learning as a way of getting students reengaged in their communities. Verba, Scholzman, and Brady have, for instance, argued that adults are more likely to become politically engaged if they have been active in community-based organizations as young adults.[96] But other research has found that service-learning either has no discernible impact or that its impact is short-lived. [97] Other research has found that those whose volunteering does impact their worldview do not necessarily see politics as an arena in which they can affect social issues.[98] In the end, young people's current spate of community volunteerism may actually be teaching them that while they may be able to help their neighbors, they cannot affect the *larger* political sphere.

Another concern with volunteering today is that organizations themselves have changed. Unlike the soup kitchens and American Red Cross of today, organizations during the 1950's and 60's were more demanding of the individual and thereby created a greater sense of community networking. Sociologist Theda Skocpol has expanded on this point:

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[96] Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
[97] Dale Blyth, Rebecca Saito, and Thomas Beikas, A Quantitative Study of the Impact of Service-Learning Programs, in A S Waterman (ed.) *Service-Learning: Applications from the Research* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 1997), 39-56.
[98] Linda J. Sax and Alexander W. Astin, The Benefits of Service: Evidence from Undergraduates, *Educational Record* 78, 25-32, 1997.

> A civil society once centered on nationally active and locally vibrant voluntary membership federations—such as the American Legion, the Elks, and the PTA—went the way of the once-popular television program *Leave It to Beaver*….By now Americans are no longer such avid joiners, although they may be organizing more civic endeavors than ever before. Professionally run advocacy groups and nonprofit institutions now dominate civic society, as people seek influence and community through a very new mix of largely memberless voluntary organizations.[99]

While today's students may very well be taking on more volunteering than previous generations, the voluntary organizations of today demand much less from them. Instead of having a more networked and central role in the group, these newer organizations relegate the individual to a subcontractor, thereby creating the removed volunteer identified here.

Conclusion

The story told in this chapter is a complicated one. Over the past forty years, young adults in the United States have come to see themselves as consumers in the marketplace. The days of the networked conventional, who saw the worlds of politics and materialism as distinct from one another, have come to an end. But today's youth have not predominantly come to see themselves as networked activists—using their personal buying choices and consumer power to affect corporate and governmental policy. Instead, they have begun to see problems and issues that might have once been

[99] Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civic Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 127.

handled through more traditional means (i.e., voting, letter writing, petition signing) as best dealt with by donating money and volunteering, thereby distancing themselves from the traditional political sphere.

One might argue that young people do not yet have the financial capital with which to engage society as networked activists. The assumption here would be that since they are just beginning to earn their own money, they are still learning the political power of the dollar. Given enough time, it might be assumed, young people will grow into more financially secure citizens who can then begin to engage in their communities through networked activism. If this were true, one could expect to see a burgeoning political force that would be free of the inequalities of the past. As Anthony Giddens has argued, life politics, within which networked activism plays a major role, is emancipatory since it works through the creative powers of free-market capitalism.[100] Might this be true for tomorrow's young people? There is reason to believe quite the opposite. Acting as a networked activist does not require one to have considered financial assets. Choosing to buy New Balance running shoes, which are made in America, instead of a pair of Nikes, which are produced in Third World sweat shops, is no more or less expensive for the consumer. Nor is it any more expensive to stop by the locally owned coffee shop instead of Starbuck's. Young people, that is, could already be making politically motivated consumer choices. They appear, however, to be doing no such thing.

Richard Sennett has recently agreed with the research reported here, arguing that, "rather than just as an angry voter, we might want to consider the citizen as a consumer

[100] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

of politics, faced with pressures to buy."[101] Unlike the optimistic views of networked activism, Sennett sees the world of consumption as essentially theatrical since the individual is asked to consume something that he or she does not actually need. For Sennett, this requires a questionably dangerous suspension of disbelief that disempowers the individual. More problematic for Sennett is that a society based on mass consumption strips the individual of vital tools necessary for democratic citizenship. Sennett suggests that "When citizens act like modern consumers they cease to think like craftsmen. This worry complements the policymaker's inattention, but more finely; the citizen-as-consumer can disengage when political issues become difficult or resistant."[102]

The idea here is that surplus capitalism and mass production have negated the need for the individual to have a working knowledge of *how* things work, to understand a sense of political process. One does not need to know how a television works since it is easier to drive to Wal-Mart and buy a new appliance than to fix the broken one sitting in one's living room. As Sennett ultimately argues, "User-friendly makes a hash of democracy. Democracy requires that citizens be willing to make some effort to find out how the world around them works….when democracy becomes modeled on consumption, becomes user-friendly, that will to know fades."[103] In the end, Sennett finds the consumer culture to be at odds with citizenship. Or as Alan Aldridge has summed up the argument:

[101] Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 133.
[102] Ibid., 169-170.
[103] Ibid., 171.

> The claim that citizens have been reduced to consumers implies a loss of political engagement. Citizenship expresses a fundamental equality, while consumerism generates and feeds on inequality. Citizens have social, economic and political rights, but they also have duties and responsibilities; consumers have merely consumer rights, and the dubious 'protection' provided by regulators. Citizens engage in collective action to make society better, whereas consumers are preoccupied with improving their own individual lot. Citizens move in the public domain, consumers retreat into a private refuge. On such accounts, citizenship is not an aspect of consumerism but its antithesis.[104]

For these scholars, there is little reason to believe that networked activism is liberating since the acts of citizens and consumers are at odds with one another. This more negative argument sees the rise of consumption as a central problem for the health of democratic citizenship.

The networked activism that some researchers have identified may actually be the dying vestiges of an older "citizen mentality." Individuals that had been politically socialized as networked traditionals found themselves with a changing political landscape. Forced to find new ways to engage a political community increasingly controlled by corporations and market forces, they turned to networked activism. Young people being raised today as consumers might, in fact, be lacking the tools of citizenship so integral to networked activists. As a result, the United States may now be harboring a

[104] Alan Aldridge, *Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 14.

nation of individually motivated citizens who fail to understand the political and collective implications of social problems and corporate issues.

As removed volunteers, today's young people have given up much of the collective political power central to civic life. Many young people today engage in politics through two avenues—by making donations to political causes and by volunteering in loose, low membership organizations. Neither decision requires communal or networked activity. Instead, each is accomplished in complete isolation, thereby giving power to special interest community organizations, the result of which is a lowered sense of individual political efficacy. A person can donate money, of course, but that buys little control over the impact of the donation. Similarly, the individual can volunteer but must do so within the organization's guidance and rules. The removed volunteer, that is, resembles the subcontracted employee of modern corporations—doing the company's work with no input into the process and no clear benefits from the community (e.g., health care).

Today's organizations are more than happy to promote this removed model of citizenship. Take, for example, the following Dana-Farber "How to Help" directive to concerned individuals visiting their website: "With the support of compassionate and committed volunteers and donors like you, Dana-Farber is able to continue the progress we've made in the fight against cancer."[105] While the removed volunteer may feel good about lending a helping hand, they have no input into the larger mission of Dana-Farber. Even the American Red Cross has learned that lesson. On the left side of the Red Cross's

[105] Dana-Farber Cancer Institute. http://www.dfci.harvard.edu/how/ (accessed May 25, 2006).

website, one finds a number of links—Donate Now, Give Blood, Tissue Donation, Volunteer, Donate Goods—that offer the following suggestions:

- Planned Giving: What is the secret to making a gift that will provide the greatest benefit to you and the American Red Cross?....Planned gifts create opportunities for both the American Red Cross and our donors. Determining what gift is right for you is just as important as making the gift. There are a myriad of easy giving options from which you can choose—from naming us as a beneficiary in your will to a more complex trust arrangement.
- Be a Red Cross volunteer! Helping others feels good, and helps you feel good about yourself. Your local Red Cross can work with you to provide rewarding experiences, opportunities to utilize your talents, or provide training to help you serve your community.

While these appeals are heart-warming, they also suggest a managerial model of civic life. What is missing from the website is a link to the individual's United States Senator or Representative. Nor does the website provide an assessment of government spending for disasters.

The American Red Cross has, moreover, pushed the point one step further. The Red Cross recently teamed with The Advertising Council, America's Blood Centers, and the AABB (an international network of blood banks), to create the Blood Saves Campaign. To increase blood donations, the organizations have put together a number of advertisements depicting young people struggling over the complicated workings of government. In one, a troubled African-American youth explains how she wanted to stop

a company from polluting local streams and rivers. She explains that she wrote her legislators to complain and then organized a protest, both of which led to the company's closing. This victory, however, led to job losses and sick children since parents had lost their health insurance. The increasingly frustrated tone of the speaker stops as the voiceover announces, "Saving the world isn't easy. Saving a life is. Donating one pint of blood can save up to three lives. Maybe even someone you know." In the end, the message is clear—let us take care of the messy business of politics. In recent years, young people have clearly heard that message.

CHAPTER FIVE

Becoming Protective

"U2 is about the impossible. Politics is the art of the possible. They're very different."—Bono, lead singer for the pop band U2

The above comment made by Bono, the lead singer of the rock band U2 and political activist in the struggle to end Third World debt, suggests a clear distinction between the worlds of politics and popular culture. Bono's assertion that politics is a science directed at what can be done[1] reminds one of Harold Lasswell's well-known definition of politics—"who gets what when and how." Popular culture, on the other hand, is a space in which people can dream and imagine utopia or dystopia but it is not a place where things necessarily get done. Bono is not, of course, the first person to stumble onto this difference. Robert Frost knew it too when he wrote that "poetry is about the grief, politics is about the grievance." Art seeks to understand the human social condition; politics wants to change the human social condition—for better or worse. While this distinction may have held for centuries, this chapter begins with the assertion that this division is no longer as clear as it was once conceived.

At a time when pop icon Bono can make the distinction made above, a growing number of scholars across many academic fields have begun suggesting that the worlds of politics and popular culture have become increasingly intermingled. This is the

[1] It is worth noting that the phrasing Bono uses is a direct quote, attributed by many as have been written by Otto von Bismarck, the first Chancellor of the German Empire.

assertion that political theorist John Street makes when arguing that "when Bono…is granted an audience with the Pope or is invited to spend time with the U.S. President in the White House, it certainly *seems* as if the worlds of politics and popular culture are almost inseparable."[2] Street further argues that there is, in fact, a clear "currency of celebrity and fame" that creates an intersection of politics and popular culture.[3] A growing number of celebrities are becoming politicians (e.g., Ronald Reagan, Sonny Bono, Clint Eastwood, Jesse Ventura, and Arnold Schwarzenegger), and a growing number of politicians are turning up in movies (e.g., Rudy Giuliani in *Anger Management*), television sitcoms (e.g., Bob Dole on *Murphy Brown*), and cartoons (e.g., Tony Blair on *The Simpsons*). It seems only natural now, in fact, to see Bruce Springsteen perform at a campaign stop for John Kerry during the 2004 Presidential race or celebrity couple Angie Harmon (actress) and Jason Sehorn (football star) deliver a speech at the 2004 Republican National Convention. Clearly, celebrities and politicians have come to find each other mutually beneficial, but the blurring of the boundaries between politics and popular culture go much further than this.

In the February 25, 2004 airing of NBC's *The West Wing*, White House intern Ryan Pierce recommended the closing of Fort Drum, a military base in northern New York, during a meeting with Deputy White House Chief of Staff Josh Lyman. The following morning, New York's Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Representative John McHugh sent a letter to Deputy Lyman in which the pair wrote that they "want to

[2] John Street, The Celebrity Politician: Political Style and Popular Culture, in John Corner and Dick Pels (eds.) *Media and the Restyling of Politics* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2003), 85.
[3] Ibid., 86.

make sure that such a recommendation doesn't make it into another *West Wing* scene. It is important that all White House advisors have the most current information to respond to such flawed proposals." One day later, *USA Today* picked up the story and criticized the letter. As the *USA Today* article on the incident begins, "People, it's just a television show."[4] The article goes on to suggest the problem it has with the "surreal missive": "'Dear Josh,' begins the letter from Clinton and McHugh, who are real, to Lyman, who is not." Clearly, the newspaper found the exchange a bit confusing.

Even if one takes Senator Clinton and Representative McHugh's letter as a tongue-in-cheek publicity stunt, the incident points to the growing interconnectedness of politics and popular culture. A television show airs an episode in which two fictional characters discuss the possibility of closing an actual military base that prompts a response by real politicians and then gets reported in the news media. There are politicians (one who is a celebrity in her own right), a television show about a fictionalized White House (with an actor—Martin Sheen—who is an outspoken Democrat), and the news media all mixed together in a single event. What is one to make of all this? Surely Senator Clinton and Representative McHugh can tell the difference between the *real* world of politics and the *fictional* one represented on television. Given that, why would these two presumably sane government leaders send a letter to a fictional Deputy White House Chief of Staff over a proposed base closing discussed during the show? Perhaps Sen. Clinton and Rep. McHugh were concerned that their constituents

[4] "Clinton writes to 'West Wing' character," (2004, February 27). *USA Today*.

might not be able to make such a distinction. Is this true? Have today's citizens lost the ability to keep politics and popular culture separated?

These worlds have indeed become entangled and it is safe to say that the resulting mélange might be having an effect on people's political perceptions. With this in mind, this chapter delves into the language of young people in the United States today to see how popular culture may be impacting their political and social views. Young people are, it turns out, turning more and more to mediated popular culture for their cues on how to engage the public. As this has happened, they have also become rather sophisticated popular culture consumers. In the end, I argue that this critical attitude has been carried over into the political world where young people have learned to be *protective critics*. To make this argument, however, I begin by first exploring how young people learn from the media in the first place.

Political Socialization and Media Spectacle

Political science research offers a long series of definitions for political socialization. Herbert Hyman suggests that political socialization concerns itself with "the beginnings of political behavior in pre-adult life, the process by which it emerges, and the subsequent changes in the course of further experience."[5] Fred Greenstein writes that political socialization is the study of "political behavior from a developmental standpoint."[6] From this point of view, Greenstein then suggests that "if political socialization extends…vertically into adult political learning, it also extends horizontally

[5] Herbert Hyman, *Political socialization: A study in the psychology of political behavior*, (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959).
[6] Fred I. Greenstein, *Children and Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1965), 9.

into ostensibly non political learning." Therefore, Greenstein calls for a research concept that will take into account "the socialized and the agents of socialization, with the assumption that the political socialization process varies within and between societies and over time."[7] Kenneth Langton suggests something a bit less psychologically rooted when he agues that "political socialization, in the broadest sense, refers to the way society transmits its political culture from generation to generation."[8] Subsequent to these earlier works in political socialization, the above definitions have been tossed about, revised and rewritten, and have come out looking little different. One recent study by Gimpel, Lay, & Schuknecht synthesizes a number of definitions from the intervening years to assert that "political socialization is the process by which new generations are inducted into political culture, learning the knowledge, values, and attitudes that contribute to support of the political system."[9] As such, political socialization is clearly an important aspect of how one forms a civic identity.

Throughout the past fifty years of research, political socialization has most often looked for the agents of socialization in two key areas: family and school. One of the earliest concerns for political socialization research was with the family, from which scholars have asserted that children gain a great portion of their political knowledge.[10] This transmission model views the child as being, more or less, a direct recipient of the

[7] Ibid., 10.
[8] Kenneth Langton, *Political socialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 4.
[9] J Gimpel, C Lay, & J Schuknecht, *Cultivating Democracy: Civic Environments and Political Socialization in America* (Waskington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 13.
[10] See Paul Allen Beck, The Role of Agents in Political Socialization, in Stanley A. Renshon (ed.), Handbook of Political Socialization (New York: Free Press, 1977); and Paul Allen Beck and M. Kent Jennings, Parents as 'Middlepersons' in Political Socialization, *Journal of Politics* 37, 1975, 81-107.

political traits of their parents, particularly at the highly symbolic level of partisanship.[11] Another important area that political socialization researchers have stressed is the school, suggesting that the curriculum, teachers, and school atmosphere all contribute to the effectiveness of the school as a socializing agent.[12] Others have agued that schools are important in the socializing process because they help foster peer groups[13] and allow for the benefits of extracurricular activities.[14] While researchers have clearly shown a connection among children, parents, and schools in the socializing process, these are clearly not the only places where young people are learning about politics.

A third major area that political scientists have been less clear about are the mass media. Given the fast-changing communication landscape of the 1960s and 1970s, it is no surprise that these early researchers failed to see much of importance. Still, some researchers did begin to find evidence of the media's political socializing force by the early 1980s. Conway et al., for instance, found that "children learn when they read newspapers or magazines, when they watch television or films, or when they listen to the radio as surely as when they read textbooks or listen to lectures. And they learn not only information but also attitudes and opinions."[15] While Conway et al., found only moderate results, they did note that the parental news habits that children witness did

[11] See Paul Allen Beck and M. Kent Jennings, Family Traditions, Political Periods, and the Development of Partisan Orientations, *Journal of Politics* 53, 1991, 742-763.
[12] Kenneth P. Langton and M. Kent Jennings, Political Socialization and the High School Civic Curriculum in the United States, *American Political Science Review* 62, 1968, 852-867; and James Simon and Bruce D. Merrill, Political Socialization in the Classroom Revisited: The Kids Voting Program, *The Social Science Journal* 35(1), 1998, 29-42..
[13] Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Participation and Learning* (New York, Christopher Publishing, 1980).
[14] David Ziblatt, High School Extracurricular Activities and Political Socialization, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political Science* 361, 1965, 21-31.
[15] M M Conway, M L Wycoff,, E Feldbaum, & D Ahern, (1981). The news media in children's political socialization. *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 45(2): 1981 164-78.

have some impact on their later levels of participation. One place political scientists have more recently noted the impact of media on the political attitudes of young adults is in their efforts to understand generational effects. In most instances, these researchers have repeatedly argued that newer trends in mass media—both decline in its usage for news gathering among young people and its heightened cynicism—have led to less efficacy in recent birth cohorts.[16]

The study of political socialization in the area of communication studies has been more forthcoming in its findings. Steven Chaffee has probably done more on this subject than anyone else over the past few decades. Chaffee has repeatedly shown how important the media are in influencing the attitudes and beliefs of young people.[17] More specifically, Chaffee and Tims have argued that radio and television can be avenues from which children can gain access to the political world and subsequently begin reading the newspaper.[18] Chaffee and Yang have warned, however, that continued reliance on television as the main source of mediated information can lead children to have lower levels of knowledge and interest in politics.[19] For Chaffee, there is little doubt that young

[16] Jennings, M. K., & Niemi, R. G. (1974). The political character of adolescence: The influence of families and schools. Princeton: Princeton University Press; Michael X. Delli Carpini, Stability and change in American politics: The coming of age of the generation of the 1960s. (New York: New York University Press 1986); Stephen E. Bennett and E W. Rademacher, The "Age of Indifference" revisited: Patterns of political interest, media exposure, and knowledge among generation x. In S. E. Bennett, S. C. Craig, & E. W. Rademacher (Eds.), *After the Boom: The Politics of Generation X* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997), 21-42.

[17] Steven H. Chaffee, L S. Ward, and L Tipton, Mass communication and political socialization. Journalism Quarterly 47: 647-59, 1970.; Chaffee, S. H. (1978). The mass media as agents of political socialization. *Journal of Political Education* 1: 127-142.

[18] Chaffee, S. H., & Tims, A. R. (1982). News media use in adolescence: Implications for political cognitions. *Communication Yearbook* 6: 736-58.

[19] Chaffee and Yang Chaffee, S. H., & Yang, S-M. (1990). Communication and political socialization. In Ichilov, O. (Ed.), *Political socialization, citizenship education and democracy* (pp. 137-157). New York: Teachers College Press.

adults in the United States have been learning about their political communities through the media.

Understanding how mediated culture politically socializes today's young people is central to uncovering their civic identities. The problem with much of the work in political socialization over the past forty years has been, however, its limited concern for media realities. Apart from a focus on newspapers and television *news*, little attention has been paid to other forms of popular culture. As it turns out, young people today are watching more (non-news) television than previous generations and increasingly using the internet for a multitude of purposes. Today, there is also an entire industry of magazines and music marketed directly to American youth. The way to begin understanding these drastic changes of the past forty years is to examine how popular culture has begun to impact young people's perceptions of their political communities.

In addition to Chafee's studies, other research deals with the medium in addition to the message. These later researchers are not concerned as much with the knowledge gained from media but, instead, with how the media, specifically television, affect young people's actions and feelings. French theorist Guy Debord's notion of *The Society of the Spectacle* allows for a broader sense of the new mediated world which young people live with today. As Debord writes in the opening lines of his book, "in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has receded into a representation." Debord's idea of the spectacle dovetails with the rise of the materialistic society described in the previous chapter. In the end, Debord's spectacle society is one organized

around images and staged events produced for consumption. The result of the spectacle is, then, a passive spectator who can do little more than be distracted by the images being consumed. Building on Debord's concept, Douglass Kellner has more recently argued that media spectacles "embody contemporary society's basic values, *serve to initiate individuals into its way of life*, and dramatize its controversies and struggles, as well as its modes of conflict resolution."[20] Kellner notes that a number of mediated outlets now "deploy the tools of the glamour industry and media spectacle," including popular music, pop music stars, movies, television, actors and even fashion—all parts of popular culture.

If this were all that was at stake, researchers concerned with civic engagement might not have much to worry about, but the media spectacle has impacted politics as well. According to Murray Edelman, what passes for politics in America today is largely an orchestrated barrage of "political spectacles."[21] These spectacles are symbolic events created by the media and their alluring and distracting manner has a destructive impact on America's democratic principles. Politics has become, according to Edelman, a show for people to watch, not a combination of real people and real issues. In many ways, then, today's young adults have been distanced from the world of politics because of the media's representation of that world. This is a distance that is keeping many young people from understanding the importance of political community.

Todd Gitlin agrees that American youth have had to learn new ways to navigate their political world. Faced with a postmodern world of fragmentation and media saturation, young people are, however, still searching "for solid ground—a search that

[20] Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2, italics added.
[21] Murray Edelman, *Constructing the Political Spectacle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

perversely leads [them] astray, as the cultural and political industries exploit old-fashioned, un-hip longings."[22] According to Gitlin, young people in the end see politics as a game.

Other scholars have looked to the impact of media on young people's civic attitudes and found similarly troubling effects. Communication and education theorist Neil Postman has gone so far as to suggest that the very act of watching television creates a passive audience. While reading leads one to think analytically about information, says Postman, "watching television requires instantaneous pattern-recognition, not delayed analytic decoding. It requires perception, not conception."[23] Postman's point here is that young people are learning to be passive receptors of large amounts of information. They are not, in contrast, learning to think critically, something necessary for active civic engagement. In a similar vein, Roderick Hart has studied how television affects the American voter, finding that television teaches us to feel good about not participating in politics. In making this argument about television as a surrogate for actual participation, Hart offers the following:

> I suggest that television provides viewers with so much vicarious political experience that they often feel too tired to vote. I suggest, further, that even when voters feel political alienated, they do not necessarily feel political *inert* because of television. Each day, the nation's media drench them in politics….Here is energy aplenty. Here is the stuff to quicken the

[22] Todd Gitlin, *Media Unlimited: How the Torrent of Images and Sounds Overwelms Our Lives* (New York: Henry Holt, 2003).
[23] Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, 78.

> pulse. Evan at home, in an overstuffed chair, watching politics can be draining.[24]

And Robert Putnam has argued that television negatively impacts political engagement and community involvement because it takes up too much of the average person's time. As can be seen from these arguments, although they may never deal overtly with political socialization, researchers have been concerned with how television teaches young adults to understand and respond to the world around them.

According to the research, then, young people are discomfited by the political world and have become a fragmented audience instead of a political community. They have also been lulled into passivity and made to feel busy without doing much of anything. As a result, young people are not taking an active role in civic life. This broad conceptualization, however, overlooks the very real work that young people believe they are doing in the political sphere. The intersection of popular culture and politics has, to put it simply, created a defensive posture for most young adults. However, this is not a passive response to politics and media; defense is, after all, often the best offense.

Young people who are primarily engaging the larger public sphere through the media may well have a distorted view of their communities. The view they are provided may not be realistic but it is powerful. That today's young adults feel the need to protect themselves against the political world is only natural but their defensiveness is not unproblematic. Understanding how all this has happened is the subject of this chapter.

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[24] Hart, *Seducing America*, 105.

The Rising Importance of Popular Culture

One clear impact of the communications revolution of the last fifty years has been the increasing salience of popular culture in the everyday lives of individuals, particularly young adults. Popular culture is not, however, a new phenomenon. It has been around for at least the past two centuries. Cultural studies scholar John Storey notes this while tracking the history of popular culture from folk music and art to its growing, globalized reach. Storey argues:

> The first concept of popular culture was invented with the discovery of the folk in the late eighteenth century and in the folklore and folk-song movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Over a period of 140 years the idea of popular culture as folk culture was developed by intellectuals across Europe and the USA. They had not set out to produce a way of thinking about popular culture, but in doing what they did—whether this was seeking to promote national cultures or to develop a science of "primitive man"—the first concept of popular culture was invented.[25]

As Storey points out here, studying folk culture as a way of understanding the masses of ordinary people led to, many years later, the very notion of a popular culture. The idea of a strict popular culture was, after all, a clear response by societal elites to differentiate their own choices of high culture from the music, art, and fiction being consumed by the masses. This is not to suggest that social class and cultural taste have not always been

[25] John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 15.

linked in some important ways, but it is to suggest that as the notion of a folk/popular culture came into being, there was a need by some to differentiate it from more aesthetically rigorous high cultures. Storey makes just this distinction when arguing "what had changed—and this is what I mean by the invention of popular culture as the 'other' of high culture—was the institutionalization of this connection between class and culture."[26] In the late nineteenth century, Shakespeare and classical music were, Storey argues, systematically removed from mass production and reserved for consumers of high culture.

This division between high and popular culture, while unclear and not always strict, held for decades. It was not until the mid-1960s, the very time I have already identified as the beginning of the postmodern shift, that one begins to find a blurring of the two.[27] The American intellectual Susan Sontag termed this blurring of cultures the "new sensibility." She claimed that a new group of artists, performers and critics had begun implementing a number of changes, thereby bringing about an end to "the Matthew Arnold notion of culture, finding it historically and humanly obsolescent."[28] This new sensibility was a revolt against modernism's canonization of high culture, which Sontag characterized through Arnold's idea of a perfect, intelligent high culture. This revolt attacked "modernism's official status, its canonization in the museum and the academy, as the high culture of the modern capitalist world."[29] Writing of the final

[26] Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture*, 45.
[27] John Seabrook, *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture* (New York: Vintage, 2001).
[28] Susan Sontag. *Against Interpretation* (New York: Dell, 1966).
[29] John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (London: Pearson, 2001), 147.

breakdown of the high culture (avant-garde art) and popular culture, Zygmunt Bauman points more directly at the distinction's impossibility:

> The end came, therefore, both from the outside and the inside of avant-garde art. The world of the mundane refused to be kept at a distance; but the supply of sites for ever new other-worldly shelters was finally exhausted. We may say that the avant-garde arts proved to be modern in their intention, yet postmodern in their consequences (their unanticipated, yet inescapable, consequences).[30]

For Bauman, the line between the two worlds could not hold because the capitalistic masses were constantly searching for new modes of cultural exchange, which they took and adopted almost at will. The line between high and popular culture could not hold. Postmodernity ultimately collapsed the categorical boundaries between the two, and popular culture became the only survivor. High culture was not kicked off the island; it was, instead, consumed by the popular.

There are, of course, still pockets of resistance, individuals and small groups holding on to the notion that they have the corner on high culture. And there is no reason to believe that the average American 15-year-old can tell the difference between Beethoven and Bach, but this is not because the cultural market is trying to systematically keep it from her. Beethoven is just as available to the consumer masses as Madonna and Britney Spears. And this is what is meant by popular culture—any form of cultural art that is produced and marketed for mass consumption. If one were to walk into Target, for

[30] Zygmunt Bauman, *Posmodernity and Its Dicontents* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 100.

instance, one could find a poster reprint of Munch's *The Scream*, Beethoven's Symphony Number 9 on compact disc, and a dusty copy of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. She could also find Nas's recent top 40 rap song that samples Beethoven's "Fur Elise" and the 1996 remake of *Romeo and Juliet* on DVD starring a gun-toting Leonardo Dicaprio and a seductive Claire Danes.

Popular culture is everywhere. Its salience, especially among young people, cannot be overstated. An entire industry of research on youth subcultures has sprung up over the past twenty years just to make sense of the impact popular culture has had on the identity formation of young adults.[31] No scholar's work in this area has had greater impact than that of sociologist Henry Giroux. Giroux has spent more than two decades studying how youth resist the hegemonic forces of adult society through the use of popular culture. Through their styles of dress (often imitating popular culture icons), displays of music, choices of movies and television shows, and brand accessories, today's youth have become wonderfully efficient at producing subcultural pockets of resistance according to Giroux. That this resistance is carried out through the use of popular culture only highlights the salience the media have in their lives. In a positive sense, young people fight with the means given them by consumerism and the mass media. In a negative sense, their very forms of resistance are easily re-coopted by the very marketers and industries that youth were originally resisting. The case of punk rock in the 1970s clearly highlights this point. Just as bands like The Sex Pistols and The Violent Femmes

[31] For two recent exemplary texts in this area, see Jonathon S. Epstein (ed), *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), and *Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris (eds), After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

began to emerge, they were quickly taken up by major label records, either by signing the acts themselves or by re-producing them in more manageable, market-friendly forms (e.g., The Ramones). The point in examining Giroux's work is not to highlight youth resistance but the sheer prevalence of popular culture in the lives of young people.

Even a cursory glance through the high school newspapers in this study indicates the growing importance of popular culture to young people over the past forty years. Wilson High School's *The Beacon* presents a clear example of this phenomenon. Beginning with the late 1960s, one finds very few references to popular culture in the newspaper. In the December 1966 eight-page issue, one finds only one article, an interview with *Temptations'* member Melvin Franklin. The student who had the opportunity to interview Franklin frames his story by writing that the Temptations are "Creating Soul" for pleasure and profit.[32] Three years later there is little change. The October 1969 issue also contains one story, a review of *The Learning Tree*, "the first American movie written, produced, and directed by a black man."[33] Two things are important to note in these examples. First, they are the only popular culture references that appear in the two editions and there are a number of editions that have no such references—explicit or implicit—at all. Second, they were discussed because of the circumstances surrounding them—examples of African Americans making it big. Given Wilson High School's large black population, both events seemed particularly salient to their lives.

[32] "Motown's Temptations Find 'Groove' 'Creating Soul' for Pleasure, Profits," *The Beacon*, December 1966.
[33] "Gordon Parks Reviews His Life in Movie," *The Beacon*, October 1969.

By the early 1970s, the amount and type of popular culture presented in the newspaper began to change. In the June 1971 issue, the newspaper reported, in addition to an interview with Doonesbury creator Gary Trudeau,[34] a movie review of Woody Allen's *Bananas*.[35] The review is short and rather unoriginal but its appearance is telling; movie reviews became a fixture in the paper from 1971 onward. And by 1972, the student reporters have also begun reviewing albums. The May 1972 issue reviewed three records—a posthumously released Jimi Hendrix album as well as albums by the Beatles and Little Richard. Within a couple of years, the newspaper had begun providing a half page to popular culture reporting, including the "Critic's Corner," which appeared in March of 1974 with a review of *The Exorcist* and a number of movies lumped together under the "Karate-Kung-fu craze."[36] Over the next decade and a half, things remained remarkably the same. By the mid-1990s, however, popular culture had taken an even stronger foothold. Instead of devoting two or three stories and reviews to movies and records, *The Beacon* began publishing them more extensively with the inclusion of satirical cartoons and horoscopes. The students at Wilson High School began, that is, to mimic the arts and entertainment sections of adult newspapers—with more emphasis on the entertainment. With the Japanimation style cartoon *Lucky & Guy*—involving guys trying to pick up girls—and advice for Scorpios to pay close attention to style, the December issue of *The Beacon* served as a clear example of how students mimicked the popular culture pages found in major newspapers.

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[34] "DOONESBURY Draws Vast, Devoted Following," *The Beacon*, June 1971.
[35] "Woody Allen in Bananas," *The Beacon*, June 4, 1971.
[36] "Critic's Corner," *The Beacon*, March 1, 1974.

The same trend one finds in *The Beacon* can also be found in the other high school newspapers represented in this study. Each begins with little discussion of popular culture. In the early years of this study moreover, when popular culture did make it into the newspaper, it was often connected to the immediate community. At Washington High School, for instance, one finds a rather amusing reference to early pop icons Sonny and Cher in 1965: "Sonny and Cher are living on the WHS campus in the home economic department. They're not rockin' and rollin' but they are eatin' and eatin'. Sonny and Cher, two white rats…are being used to show the girls the benefits of proper nutrition."[37] At Lamar High School in Houston, the students were excited to report that The Lovin' Spoonful were coming to the city in concert since they were the "Rock and Roll Sweetenr according to Look magazine."[38] And at Carrick High School in Pittsburgh, one student reported on an interview he got the chance to do with The Evergreen Blues just before the taping of a television show.[39] In all of these early instances, the popular culture references had some direct connection to the local community. But just as this trend changed at Wilson High School above, it also changed at the other schools sampled in this study.

Beginning in the early 1970s, references to popular culture began to multiply. These articles, moreover, no longer needed a direct, local connection for them to appear in the newspaper. By late 1972, the change can be seen at Carrick High School, where a regular "Musical Notes" column began appearing.[40] By the fall of 1974, the students at

[37] "Sonny, Cher at WHS," *Ram Page*, October 15, 1965.
[38] "Lovin' Spoonful Concert Coming," *The Lancer*, November 17, 1966.
[39] "Gary Bennett 'Come(s) Alive' on WIIC," *The Carrickulum*, December 22, 1967.
[40] "New Book About 'Beatles' is Best Seller," *The Carrickulum*, November 1972.

Oak Park High School had already begun setting aside three-quarters of a page for arts and entertainment articles in each issue. Even in the *Ram Page* from Washington High School in Phoenix, the last in this study to begin regular reviews of music and movies, the paper began running a weekly movie review, albeit on the bottom of the opinion page, in the fall of 1974. By the mid 1970s, then, all of the school newspapers in this study had begun routinely publishing movie and album reviews.

Over the next few decades, the amount of popular culture that makes its way into the high school newspapers in this study is startling. One issue of Grant High School's *The Grantonian* from November of 1992 makes this especially evident. In 1992, *The Grantonian* was eight pages—two pages each of news and sports, and one page each of features, editorials, opinions, and entertainment. The November 20 issue covered a number of stories, including a piece on a new teen health clinic and an assessment of Fall sports. It was also filled with references to popular culture. One finds a story on what to anticipate in the new Democratic administration including references to popular psychic Jeanne Dixon, Elvis, and the entertainment news show *Inside Edition*. One story tells about two students who spent twelve hours as extras on a movie set at a Portland club and another offers a positive review of a new techno band—the Utah Saints. In addition, one finds three film-related stories and an Opinion page that is mostly devoted to Director Spike Lee and his latest film, *Malcolm X*. This story is accompanied by six student opinions, each with his or her own picture. And there is also an editorial blasting NBA players for forcing Magic Johnson to leave the Lakers because of the HIV virus. In all,

eight articles were devoted to a wide array of popular culture—almost half the newspaper.

One finds, then, a presumed increase in the salience of popular culture in the lives of young people over the last forty years. This is not a groundbreaking observation but it is important. Naturally, this study cannot begin to measure how much popular culture is being consumed by these students outside of their reading habits, but the increase in newspaper coverage is surely representative of a larger trend. The student reporters and their advisors clearly find that spending more of their time on material related to movies, music and celebrity is what the student body expects of them. And this is important since the more time spent on popular culture means less time spent on other (news-related) issues. It is one thing to note the increased salience of popular culture *in* the lives of young people, but it is quite another to understand the impact of popular culture *on* them. This latter calculation requires one to pay attention not to *what* is being talked about but *how* it is being discussed.

A Generation of Critics

A popular assumption about the more recent generations of young people in the United States, groups often referred to as Generations X and Y, holds that young people have become overwhelmingly cynical—negative, pessimistic, and jaded. Young people, of course, often rebel during their teen years to seek self-autonomy and separate themselves from their parents, and it is no wonder that parents often find this behavior troublesome or irritating. But recent generations of young people seem to have become one of the most cynical generations ever. In 1993, *The Washington Post*, for example,

described Generation Xer's as "cry babies" and then told them to "grow up."[41] Richard Linklater's 1991 movie, *Slacker*, offered a portrait of an entire generation of youth whose cynicism had caused them to disengage from society. And this mindset remains strongly entrenched. In a recent online review of the popular Austin, Texas, music and film festival South by Southwest, Mike Oren characterized the scene as "the old hippies vs. the young cynics." Whether in the news media or popular culture itself, young people entering high school after 1975 have been seen as cynics. While today's young people do seem more skeptical and resistant than previous generations, they are not necessarily a generation of cynics. That is, they may have become apathetic and tired of the world around them, but that may only make them *critics*, not cynics.

Being a critic requires that one pay attention to the world around one. It also demands that one have something to say about that world. A cynic may stand above society and mock it without engaging it, but the critic must engage the world to get a sense of what is wrong. Raymond Williams nicely captures the critical mindset when observing that, "criticism has become a very difficult word, because although its predominant general use is of fault finding, it has an underlying sense of judgment and a very confusing specialized sense, in relation to art and literature, which depends on assumptions that may now be breaking down."[42] The three main concepts to take from Williams are (1) that criticism is primarily about finding fault in something, (2) that there

[41] Chistopher Geroges, The Boring Twenties; Grow Up, Crybabies, You're America's Luckiest Generation, *The Washington Post*, September 12, 1993, C1.
[42] Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 84-85.

is a sense of judgment tied up in being a critic, and (3) that the specialized notion of the artistic or literary critic does not hold any longer.

Formalized criticism of the arts, of course, cannot flourish if the division between popular culture and high art has been largely erased over the past several decades. What is important to note here is the negativity offered by the other two parts of Williams' sense of criticism. The modern critic, that is, looks primarily for negative aspects of the criticized object when passing judgment on it. Looking at the high school reviews of popular culture across the past forty years shows that this negativity fits rather well with young people's sensibilities.

Youth have not, however, always been critics. At Grant High School in Portland in 1978, for instance, one student reviewed a new "electric western" and a very young Don Johnson. The student spent much of his time on the actor's impact in the movie depicting the lives of two gunfighters: "To make a long story short, the pair end up by fighting each other, which is ironic because they were such close friends." One gets the impression here that the reviewer is not very impressed with the movie, but the tone of his criticism is largely ironic. At Wilson High School in 1975, one student offered the following review of The Who's psychedelic rock opera: "All in all, 'Tommy' is a unique film—one should go prepared to experience it rather than watch it. Whether or not it merited the massive opening night party thrown in the New York subway is debatable, but it is definitely a movie not to be ignored."[43] Again, one gets the sense that the

[43] Tommy: a movie?, *The Beacon*, June 10, 1975.

student reviewer did not quite understand what to do with the movie but she also did not know how to savage it in the manner of her successors.

By the start of the 1980s, one finds that the level of criticism from the student reporters began to advance as they picked up more complex ways of critiquing popular culture. By 1981, one student reviewer at Grant High School in Portland had already begun showing a more multifaceted approach to reviewing the horror film sequel, *Halloween II*. The review covers the acting of Jamie Lee Curtis and points to serious problems with the writing and directing of the movie before reaching the reviewer's conclusion:

> It turned out more like one of the carbon copy rip-offs of "Halloween" that were churned out to cash in on its initial success such as "The Boogeyman," "Prom Night," "Terror Train," and countless other exploitation pictures. Overall "Halloween II" is only worthy of a viewing for the curious, but it may be a big disappointment for fans of John Carpenter and of the original "Halloween."[44]

This review includes, among other things, a comparison to a list of other films and it ties the reviewer to the fandom of the original movie and its director. Both of these moves clearly demonstrate the author's knowledge of the horror film industry. The review also points to the author's assumption that he can tell the difference between a good movie and weaker carbon copies. While the review is not positive, it is still presented with a sense of naiveté, a reviewer still learning the art of criticism.

[44] "'Halloween II' disappointing minus director Carpenter," *The Grantonian*, November 12, 1981.

Throughout the mid-1980s, this sort of criticism is the norm. The students offered a wide array of movie reviews and each rather benignly mimicked adult reviewing styles:

- "The acting is excellent. McClain and Winger proved their acting talents, once again. Because of the fine acting, by the end of the movie you feel like you really know these people. Hopefully *Terms of Endearment* will get an Oscar Nomination, it definitely deserves one."[45]
- Garry Marshall, who has given us such infamous television shows as 'Laverne & Shirley' and 'Mork & Mindy,' has not created a concise, amusing comedy/drama in the same genre as, let's say, *The Graduate*. Don't be deceived by the title of *The Flamingo Kid*; behind the glitz of the ostentatious beach club setting lies a sophisticated discussion of success, wealth, and happiness."[46]
- "The latest chapter in the Rocky Balboa saga opened nationwide on Wednesday. Rocky is the 'rags-to-riches' story about a man from the ghettos working his way up to become a heavy weight boxer, later the World Boxing Champion….I found *Rocky IV* a well-done movie."[47]

Of all three of these examples, the harshest criticism comes from the review of *The Flamingo Kid* when the reviewer asserts that Matt Dillon cannot really act. Otherwise, the critical reviews from the 1980s were not very critical at all.

By the 1990s, however, one finds a very different tone in the newspapers' popular culture criticisms, as we see in the movie reviews below:

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[45] "'Terms' is worth seeing," *The Northmen's Log*, January 20, 1984.
[46] "Choice Pics," *Denebola*, January 23, 1985.
[47] "Rocky IV's appeal," *Ram Page*, December 20, 1985.

- "If you've seen Titanic or Armageddon, you've seen Pearl Harbor. It's simply one more recycled plotline to add to the archives. The equation is a fairly simple one: add a rugged group of working class heroes to an overly dramatic love story, mix it all in with some sort of crisis (historical or not) and multiply it by three hours of fantastic explosions, and Blammo!—movie in a can."[48]
- "About every thirty minutes, something bad would happen to a big satellite dish. This dish made it possible for five men to talk to Neil Armstrong. It was the biggest dish in the world and was located in Australia in a sheep field. I could hardly stay awake, so I suggest that you save your money and your time and not see this horrible movie [*The Dish*]."[49]
- "'The Beach' is a visually stunning film that is sabotaged by the lack of clear issues and a weak plot….My initial reaction to 'The Beach' was that it was a movie with the depth of an Abercrombie and Fitch catalogue."[50]

Each of these reviews works off the same critical pattern in which the reviewer finds nothing in the film worthwhile. *Pearl Harbor* is unoriginal, *The Dish* is boring, and *The Beach* is empty. Each of these reviews also posits the reviewer as somehow too savvy for the material being examined. The student-critics present themselves as popular culture elites looking down with a detached and dismissive air at the movies that dare to entertain them.

[48] "Movie Review: Pearl Harbor," *The Northmen's Log*, May 25, 2001.
[49] "Movie Review: The Dish," *The Lamar Lancer*, October 2000.
[50] "DiCaprio's latest: no day at 'The Beach,'" *The Grantonian*, March 16, 2000.

It seems, then, that as young people became more immersed in popular culture they also became archly critical. This was not only the case with movies. It happened just as dramatically with music. While earlier music reviews were either neutral or positive pieces, later reviews become quite biting. Mandy Moore's music is alleged to be filled with "generic and often cheesy lyrics;"[51] Will Smith is said to lose his touch with "unfitting lyrics and monotonous beats;"[52] and even the punk band. Green Day, is said to be sell-outs.[53] For communication scholar John Sloop, this move toward increasingly negative criticism comes as no surprise since mainstream "popular music criticism encourages an aesthetic that is celebratory toward cynical self-reflectiveness and musical commodification."[54] Sloop's assertion here suggests that it somehow became cool to knowingly make fun of the popular culture one consumes. That young people, as heavy consumers of popular culture, would learn this negative critical stance from outlets such as MTV and *Rolling Stone* magazine seems only natural in retrospect.

It is worth noting here again that not all the popular culture reviews were this negative. Movies were often praised for having good direction, actors for acting well, and bands for playing acceptable music. One area that seemed to get the most praise from the young reporters in this study was popular culture itself. One Kansas City student offered an example of this high praise when he applauded the biting and satirical comedy of shock-jock Howard Stern: "I thought that *Private Parts* was definitely the most vulgar and distasteful movie, with every scene packed with many racial slurs and

[51] "Mandy Moore's bubblegum pop leaves a bad taste," *The Grantonian*, January 20, 2000.
[52] "Smith loses his touch with 'Lost,'" *The Northmen's Log*, April 29, 2005.
[53] "Green Day sells out," *The Grantonian*.
[54] John M. Sloop, The Emperor's New Makeup: Cool Cynicism and Popular Music Criticism, *Popular Music and Society*, 52.

sexual references. It was these very same obscene jokes that made the movie absolutely hysterical."[55] And a Pittsburgh reviewer genuinely seemed to lament the cancellation of one of MTV's most popular programs of the 1990s: "The years keep on going by, and things start to get worse and worse. Can't we go back to the good old days when things were good? Back when 'Beavis and Butthead' was on the air. 'Beavis and Butthead' is arguably the greatest show in the 90's."[56] What ties these two types of popular culture together, of course, is their cynical attitude toward society and media. As Steven Best and Douglas Kellner point out, Beavis and Butthead truly exemplify their era:

> Mentally challenged though they are, Beavis and Butthead are very shrewd in their own element, as they play the role of media critic and construct their Manichean world of cool versus suck. They rarely are viscerally attached to and numbed by TV; rather, they engage in an ongoing critical and deconstructive analysis that exposes pretentiousness, mocks advertisements, and even decodes the pornographic content of many music videos.[57]

In a sense, popular culture icons such as Beavis and Butthead, Howard Stern, Bart Simpson, the Southpark kids, and the cast of Saturday Night Live serve as exemplars of the cynicism found in popular culture. The young people of Generations X and Y who have grown up on such shows have learned that it is cool not to care too much.

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[55] "Private Parts: Not so private after all," *The Northmen's Log*, March 21, 1997.
[56] "Classic TV: Beavis and Butthead," *The Carrickulum*, April 11, 2002.
[57] Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, "Beavis and Butthead: No Future for Postmodern Youth," in *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World*, Jonathon S. Epstein, ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), 74-99.

Mixing Politics with Popular Culture

Having argued that young people over the last forty years have been increasingly immersed in popular culture and become more critical, has this negativity made its way into their political attitudes as well? As it turns out, it has indeed.

In the past ten years, a large corpus of research has emerged on the subject of politics and popular culture. While some researchers have argued that the "popularization of culture and the democratization of politics" go hand in hand[58] and that popular politics can create a rational citizen-fandom,[59] much of the research in this area has been less than positive. John Street has pointed out, for instance, that "parties and politicians are increasingly marketing and packaging themselves to attract voters, using the same devices advertisers deploy for perfumes and cars."[60] Darrell West and John Orman have argued that the line between celebrity and politicians has largely and dangerously been erased, pointing out that in the 1990s "the celebrity-star system became institutionalized with politicians becoming interchangeable with other guest celebrities on television talk shows."[61] John Fiske has shown that the media play a primary and biased role in the blending of the popular and political.[62] And David Swanson has more directly questioned this hybridization of political news and entertainment, arguing that "mainstream journalism has sought to market itself to consumers in both style and

[58] Jon Simons, Popular Culture and Mediated Politics: Intellectuals, Elites and Democracy, in John Corner and Dick Pels (eds), *Media and the Restyling of Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2003), 171-189.
[59] Liesbet van Zoonen, *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).
[60] John Street, *Politics and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 45-46.
[61] Darrell M. West and John Orman, *Celebrity Politics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2003), 9.
[62] John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

substance, effecting compromises that are deplored by some of its most respected practitioners and blur its identity as distinct from other forms."[63] For all these researchers, the blending of politics and popular culture threatens to trivialize citizens as well as political institutions. In such a scheme, politics features the aesthetics of the image rather than the rationality of group action.

Robert Hariman has pointed out that aesthetics has always played a role in the world of politics when he examines a number of historical political texts through the lens of classical rhetoric. In the end, Hariman suggests that in a postmodern world "style becomes an analytical category for understanding a social reality; in order to understand the social reality of politics, we can consider how a political action involves acting according to a particular political style."[64] While Hariman's argument is persuasive, it does not completely account for the mediated politics most citizens receive. Style is one thing, but the image presented through mediated channels is something altogether different. In the blending of politics and popular culture, the mediated image is the zeitgeist, and the image carries with it a separate set of concerns. Rhetorical theorist Barry Brummett argues that the power of the image has a fundamentally aesthetic value. For Brummett, the image "appeals first not to the public's powers of reason and analysis but to pleasure and entertainment, to an emotional sense of bonding or disgust with a figure."[65] Sociologist Barry Richards agrees with the assertion that politics has

[63] David L. Swanson, The Homologous Evolution of Political Communication and Civic Engagement: Good News, Bad News, and No News, *Political Communication* 17, 409-414, 2000.
[64] Robert Hariman, *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 9.
[65] Barry Brummett, Communities, Identities, and Politics: What Rhetoric Is Becoming in the Twenty-First Century, in Patricia A. Sullivan and Steven R. Goldzwig (eds.), *New Approaches to Rhetoric* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2004), 295-296.

increasingly centered on the image when arguing that part of the explanation for low voter turnout can be found in an "emotional deficit" created by today's political actors failing to meet the emotional needs of the electorate.[66] The argument here, then, is that modern politics—which has become heavily mediated and inextricably linked with popular culture—has become a home to the image. If this is true, one would expect to find young people talking about politics and the news media with the same negative tone they use when discussing broader cultural matters.

Just as popular culture was slow to make its way into the discourse of young people, discussion of the news media did not begin to emerge until the 1980s. Prior to the Watergate Scandal, coverage of the Vietnam War, and the start of cable television, young people in the United States had little to say about the press. When they discussed it at all, it was usually about the raw news itself. One of the few early references to the news media typifies the praiseworthy attitudes of the 1960s and 1970s:

> To focus the spotlight on the role the newspaper plays in protecting the people's three great freedoms—Freedom of the Press…Freedom of Speech…and Freedom of religion, the newspaper industry proclaims one week each year as National Newspaper Week….President Lyndon B. Johnson and many of the Governors of the various states will make it official with statements and proclamations.[67]

[66] Barry Richards, The Emotional Deficit in Political Communication, *Political Communication* 21 (2004), 339-352.
[67] "Newspaper Industry Honored in October," *The Lancer*, October 6, 1966

The news from Houston in 1966, then, was that the news media are guardians of American rights. That same sentiment is found in Washington D.C., where one student reported on his numerous visits to a local television station: "Of all the visits, election night surpassed them all. From 7:30 p.m. until early midnight, the Fellows observed activities, which provided accurate and complete election results and newscasts."[68] Given the limited number of news media outlets and the relative novelty of television, one is not surprised to find this rather respectful attitude toward the news in the early years of this study. But as the 1970s came to a close, things began to change quickly.

When looking at the discussion of mediated politics in the high school newspapers in the 1980s, one finds a group of young people quite aware of the power and problems of the media. The following extended quotation from a 1982 editorial about the news media clearly highlights the willingness of teenagers to question news institutions:

> It is no secret we are heavily dependent on the media. Being so dependent on the media, have we ever wondered about all the things trusty Walter Cronkite never told us? Obviously the influence of the press on it's society is significant….As any other business the media is also vulnerable to bias, falsehoods and manipulation. In recent months we have seen public officials and policy makers use the press for a variety of reasons—to advance program and policy goals, further career ambitions, create and adjust public awareness to build public support….By controlling what information is and is not delivered and how the information is presented,

[68] "Students Gain Journalistic Experience from WTOP," *The Beacon*, November 30, 1970.

> the media can play a large role in limiting the range of interpretations that the audiences are able to make. It is not that the media is telling people 'what' to think. Instead, they tell their audiences what to think 'about.'….A free press is one of the most valuable possessions a country can defend. It is the crown jewel of the freedom of speech rights. Ideally, the media is a puritan institution free of bias, falsehoods and manipulations. Realistically, the press is a human job with a big responsibility. We should reconsider before we adorn the media with the labels of 'unbiased source,' 'the public conscience,' and the 'reporters of truth.'[69]

This student's assessment of the press is enough to make a communication scholar proud. By pointing to peoples' dependence on the news media, this student recognizes the press's ability to at least partially function as a fourth-estate of government.[70] Keying on the ability of public officials to decide the news for media outlets, he clearly emphasizes the agenda-setting function of the press and then goes on to highlight the second-level agenda setting function of the news media as well.[71] He even offers a glimpse of "framing research" in communications when arguing that the news media present a bias that can be ideologically manipulative.[72]

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[69] "The media influences Americans," *The Northmen's Log*, May 14, 1982.
[70] See Timothy Cook, *Governing with the News* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
[71] See Maxwell McCombsMaxwell and George Estrada, The News Media and the Pictures in Our Heads. In Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves (eds) *Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters, and Reporters in America*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997) 237-247.
[72] See Stephen D. Reese, Framing Public Life, in Stephen D. Reese, Oscar Gandy, and August Grant (Eds.) *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001) 7-32.

Although praiseworthy for his understanding of the news media, the student's tone also indicates a severe skepticism. He does not trust media outlets or the politicians who "use the press" for their own ends. Even while tempering his criticism with the assertion that the media do not in fact tell people what to think, he is concerned that they are not unbiased in what they count as news. He understands that the press is a human endeavor but then suggests that its humanness is exactly why he and his peers should not believe all they are told. He knows intuitively what Michael Schudson demonstrated earlier—that an objective and purely factual news media is an impossibility and that most people understood that the news is subjectively created.[73] More than anything, the Kansas City student seems to be urging his peers to actively question the validity of what the media present to them.

While the above editorial highlights some of the growing media savvy of young people in the 1980s, their peers in the 1990s became even more critically protective. A 1997 editorial in *The Rampage* highlights the press's tendency to report certain news stories in feeding-frenzy fashion: "The media has been covering many unnecessary stories. News does deserve national attention, but repeated news stories do not. The Heaven's Gate cult recently received this kind of attention."[74] This article, which goes on to talk about how the news media over-report stories that are not particularly important, shows a clear disdain for reporters' choices. A student reporter on the *Denebola* also understands feeding frenzies and details their effects for her readers:

[73] Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
[74] "Is it news, or just a case of déjà vu?," *The Rampage*, May 2, 1997.

> Presidential and government scandals also dominate news reports. After the success of the 1974 publishing of All the President's Men and the prior reporting by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, networks, newspapers, and newsmagazines have been eager to find the next scandal that will lure an audience and win accolades.[75]

Both of these pieces lament the news media's habit of looking for a story that catches the attention of the public and then reporting on that story for months at a time. That is, students now seem turned off by the news media's very attempts to get them to pay attention.

In addition, the students have complaints about how the news media cover events. As the following example from Portland's *The Grantonian* highlights, students neither appreciate nor respect media biases: "Much of the media tells us only part of the story or they avoid it all together if it doesn't fit their requirements, especially if it reflects poorly on the US government."[76] This student clearly wants more objective reporting and a more open aspect to the media's gate-keeping function. And when it comes to political coverage specifically, the young people of the 1990s had little positive to say. At North Park High School in Kansas City, a report on election coverage demonstrates young people's distaste of the news served up to them:

> In fighting for shares, network news has also turned to episodic reporting, called "horse race journalism," in which the pollsters, campaign staff, and candidates' personalities are what is covered. The media focuses on the

[75] "Journalism: Forum for political debate," *Denebola*, March 10, 1997.
[76] "Biased media coverage obvious," *The Grantonian*, January 17, 2003.

stories behind the campaigns instead of the issues driving them. Witness the popularity of George Stephanopolos and James Carville after the 1992 race.

While one might be tempted to appreciate this young person's understanding of news routines, the attitudes he represents point toward an almost complete sense of detachment. As Roderick Hart has argued, young people may be hiding behind a belief that they are too clever for the pedestrian work of the workaday media.[77]

In addition to showing disrespect for the press, young people have also taken a mocking tone toward politicians. In response to the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan, for instance, one student at Wilson High School argued: "It is evident that the decisive factor in the president's image is that which is projected on television. Television is by far the most effective medium of communication for the population en masse. Could it not take over completely in bringing the president 'live' to the American people?"[78] While this assertion suggests a questioning stance toward television, ten years later young people had grown positively annoyed with it. The following examples highlight this shift in attitude:

- "They're back!!! Just when you thought it was safe to pick up a newspaper…the latest news on the upcoming 1992 presidential election may make you want to put it back down….In the race for the Democratic nomination. Hart's only opponent appears to be Phoenix resident 'Alf.' Both parties, however, have yet another

[77] Hart, *Seducing America*.
[78] "The President's Place," *The Beacon*, April 1982.

opponent to face. Liberal Billy Idol seems to be running on his own through campaign messages in his music."[79]

- "The first and foremost question is do we re-elect President Bill Clinton or bring in the elder statesman Bob Dole? Maybe, just maybe, we should give old Ross Perot a whirl? Personally, I'd rather cast my vote for Mickey Mouse….I've never seen Mickey whip out a graph in the middle of a parade, or bash Donald Duck's character in an interview. No mudslinging, no empty promises, not taxes, nothing but mouse."[80]
- "Televised debates are an American political tradition that we, the up-coming American voting public, must identify as either worthwhile or worthy of doing away with. It is not only important to decide if the information put forth by candidates is important enough to take up an entire hour time-slot on NBC's Thursday night and perhaps knock "Friends" off the air, but also if it is worth placing two "grown-ups" on a large stage together and then just letting them go at it. If we wanted to see a grudge match we would watch WWF. I guess it is up to us. Maybe once we turn 18 we will use our right to vote: to either vote these debates out of existence or vote to keep them."[81]

It is not, of course, unusual for citizens to make jokes at the expense of politicians or the political process. Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt got his nickname, after all, from a political cartoon poking fun at his killing a wounded bear in Louisiana. What is troubling

[79] "They're back! The latest news on upcoming presidential election," *The RamPage*, May 19, 1989.
[80] "Forget the candidates; let's vote for Mickey," *The Rampage*, November 1, 1996.
[81] "Politicians are immature," *Denebola*, October 30, 1998.

about the above examples is that the authors have adopted an unreflexive, mocking tone, a tone they seem to have learned from the very popular culture they consume so readily. At Grant High School, for instance, one student even writes an editorial attacking what he saw as a one-sided school assembly (urging support for a school bond measure) by framing the entire piece as a "Nightmare on 36th Street."[82] The writer spends most of his time questioning whether or not he had dreamt about the assembly, likening himself to the characters in the popular horror film series *Nightmare on Elm Street*. The piece sarcastically mixes the popular with the political and the humorous with the sarcastic. In these ways and more they fuse together the worlds of politics and entertainment.

Examining the above examples, one also gets a sense of paranoia. Everywhere they look, young people see enemies—the news media cannot be trusted and politicians do not have the people's best interests at heart. Given the mediated world in which they live, this response makes sense. Today's young people have learned what Surrealist painter Salvador Dali referred to as the paranoiac-critical method—"spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the critical and systematic objectivity of the associations and interpretations of delirious phenomena."[83] For Dali, by simulating paranoia one can undermine a more realistic understanding of the world. As artist Marcel Jean wrote:

> One can see, or persuade others to see, all sorts of shapes in a cloud: a horse, a human body, a dragon, a face, a palace, and so on. Any prospect or object of the Physical world can be treated in this manner, from which

[82] "Nightmare on 36th Street," *The Grantonian*, February 21, 2003.
[83] Salvador Dali, *Oui: The Paranoid-Critical Revolution: Writings 1927-1933* (New York: Distributed Arts Publisher, 2004).

> the proposed conclusion is that it is impossible to concede any value whatsoever to immediate reality, since it may represent or mean anything at all.[84]

The idea of the paranoiac-critical method was to replace reality with an unstable image. This is, of course, exactly what mediated popular culture has been doing, with research showing that television and the news media hardly offer realistic portrayals of the world at large. Instead, they present a world of sharp negativity. To find that today's young adults have trouble seeing anything but these negative images is not surprising. And also unsurprising is their need to protect themselves from this mediated onslaught.

That young people have increasingly adopted a protective critical attitude against popular political culture might not be so troubling if they had not also imported it into the civic and community realms. One young writer seemed aware of such concerns in the early 1970s, arguing that this attitude would do young people no good:

> It is often said that Watergate has made people cynical about their government, and that young people are turning away from politics because of it. With everything from burglary to deals with ITT being uncovered in the Nixon administration it is understandable that people become disillusioned. But disillusionment does not have to lead to cynicism….The government is not going to change unless we make it.

[84] Marcel Jean, *The History of Surrealist Painting* (New York: Grove Press, 1960).

> Turning off from politics won't make the problems go away; it will only let the politicians do what they want.[85]

More contemporary youth are nowhere near as hopeful. Today, students wanting to engage their peers in civic conversation begin with the assumption that no one really cares about the matters they are addressing:

- "On Jan. 21, 1993 President-elect Bill Clinton will be inaugurated as the new President of the United States, leader of the 'free world' and all the other clichés that go along with a transfer of power. For the five people that read this column, relax, it is probably the last on politics this year."[86]
- "Please bear with me now; I know you are probably pretty bored with all the political propaganda and media flying all about these days, but I think I've discovered a solution. Put God in charge."[87]
- "Celebrities are used to promote this by making appearances and endorsing the program. This makes voting seem more appealing and glamorous. MTV is out to change the stereotype that adults are the only ones with real authority….Many South students were not aware of the show and none had actually watched it on its normal timeslot. Although the commercials constantly play on MTV, the majority of Newton South has not yet chosen to 'rock the vote.'"[88]

[85] "We must prevent future Watergates," *Denebola*, March 13, 1974.
[86] "Clinton says 'There are no overnight miracles' for America's economy," *The Grantonian*, November 20, 1992.
[87] "Campaign 2000; God, Please help us," *The Rampage*, November 9, 2000
[88] "MTV adds some pop to politics," *Denebola*, October 29, 2004.

Whether it is disparaging presidential politics (the only national politics young people pay much attention to) or discussing the importance of voting, even young people concerned about their political communities in the 1990s knew better than to be seen as unduly serious. They seem to know they are fighting an uphill battle when commenting on such matters and, as a result, often deconstruct their arguments even when making them.

Conclusion

Researchers have been suggesting for many years now that the news media's role in politics plays an important part in structuring citizens' attitudes. Most notably, Joseph Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have argued that the news media's negative framing of politicians and political events have led viewers and readers to adopt a cynical posture.[89] The more cynical the news, the more cynical the citizen. This conclusion is particularly important since, as Timothy Cook has shown, over time "media strategies have become increasingly useful means for political actors to pursue governance—and become an increasing focus of their attention and their activities—as the disjuncture between the power of those actors and the expectations placed on them grows."[90] As a fourth governing institution, the news media have begun playing an integral role in how the nation is being governed.

While both of these arguments may be true, young adults do not pay much attention to the news media. In a recent national survey for The Center for Information &

[89] Joseph N. Cappella and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[90] Timothy E. Cook, *Governing With the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 118.

Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, Mike Olander reported that while young adults are still more likely to turn on their televisions to get the news than to use any other source, less than half of them do so more than a few times a week. Less than a third of young adults read the newspaper more than twice a weak, and while they are listening to the radio and surfing the internet, young people are not using these media to gather civic information. Young people are not ardent news consumers so it is hard to imagine that their attitudes are being shaped by the news media.

This chapter has argued that today's young people are, however, inundated with popular culture and that this saturation has led them to become excessively self-protective. Subsequently, young people have adopted a skeptical attitude, a style that fits right into popular culture. How could they not do so? When Bill Clinton played the saxophone on the *Arsenio Hall Show* during his 1992 presidential campaign and when guests such as presidential hopefuls Senator John McCain and John Kerry become regular guests on Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show*, it is no wonder that young people see politics and entertainment synonymously. What is troubling is that while politicians increasingly use entertainment to attract the attention of the electorate, they may also be pushing away potential voters whose critical attitudes buffer them from caring overly much about bands, movies, television shows, and celebrity politicians alike.

Every generation has its own catch-words that help identify its predominant attitude. Today's generation's word is *cool*. As the Chicago Sun-Times reported in February 2006, "Groovy is over, hip is square, far out is long gone. Don't worry,

though—it's cool. 'Cool' remains the gold standard of slang in the 21st century."[91] The word cool is not new, even its usage as slang in modern times has a history dating back at least to the hippie movement, where staying cool meant not getting angry. But today's use of cool is different—it is rooted in popular culture. As Malcolm Gladwell found out while reporting on the marketing practice of coolhunting, cool is an elusive term:

> The essence of the third rule of cool [is]: you have to be one to know one….In this sense, the third rule of cool fits perfectly into the second: the second rule says that cool cannot be manufactured, only observed, and the third says that it can only be observed by those who are themselves cool. And, of course, the first rule says that it cannot accurately be observed at all, because the act of discovering cool causes cool to take flight, so if you add all three together they describe a closed loop, the hermeneutic circle of coolhunting, a phenomenon whereby not only can the uncool not see cool but cool cannot even be adequately described to them….It is not possible to be cool, in other words, unless you are-in some larger sense-already cool, and so the phenomenon that the uncool cannot see and cannot have described to them is also something that they cannot ever attain, because if they did it would no longer be cool. Coolhunting represents the ascendancy, in the marketplace, of high school.[92]

[91] Larry Neumeister, "When It Comes to Slang, Just Remember to Stay 'Cool,'" *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 11, 2006.
[92] Malcolm Gladwell, "The Coolhunt," the New Yorker, March 17, 1997.

Cool in unobservable because of its transient nature, unmanufacturable because it must happen naturally, and unrepresentable because one either is or is not cool. Still, most teenagers want to be cool.

So how do they do so? Through the act of criticism. A critic, as noted above, does not have to be negative, but today's young people have taken on criticism by combining its analytical function with an overwhelming dose of fault-finding. And this makes sense for the average young person trying to be cool in a pop cultured world where coolness is inherently elusive. By not attaching themselves to anything in particular and perpetually tearing down everything they see, young people can feel cool, or at least they can feel temporarily protected. This might be perfectly harmless in a world of pop star icons that blend from one hot trend to the next—Britney Spears followed by Christina Aguilera followed by Jessica Simpson followed by Mandy Moore, ad nauseum.

In the world of democratic politics, the costs are higher. It is one thing for a young person to protect himself against being seen as uncool for liking an out-of-fashion pop star. It is another issue when these attitudes carry over into politics. Whether Mandy Moore is still popular enough to sell albums matters little to American democracy, but who gets elected president and how government is (or is not) held accountable for its actions matters a great deal. The responsibilities of democratic civic engagement may not be cool but they are central to the health of the nation. Ultimately, politics requires risks of us.

That today's politicians have so readily merged into the popular culture world only muddles the civic landscape. What explains Bill Clinton's coolness when

participating in the MTV Choose or Lose special during the 1992 campaign but made Al Gore a pandering opportunist when he joined an MTV town hall meeting in 2000? While it was new and different (i.e., cool) for Clinton to do so in the early 1990s, Al Gore's attempt to attract youthful voters eight years later was decidedly stale and overdone (i.e., not cool). It is noteworthy that Clinton's antic brought 42% of 18-24 year-olds to the polls in 1992 but that Gore could only help muster 32% eight years later. These results have mattered a great deal in recent American history. But did young people notice? Did young people care? These are *political* questions.

CHAPTER SIX

Becoming Fragmented

Indifference reduces the Other to an abstraction.—Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.

In 2005, *The Atlantic Monthly* commissioned the French intellectual Bernard-Henri Levy to retrace the path of Alexis de Tocqueville. Tocqueville was the first of a number of French observers who sought to understand America's democratic experiment. Tocqueville was also the first to find America's love of individualism troubling. Tocqueville noted in 1835 that "providence has given each individual the amount of reason necessary for him to look after himself in matters of his own exclusive concern. That is the great maxim on which civil and political society in the United States rests."[1] Tocqueville goes on to question the tension found in this self-reliance when reflecting on the reasons despotism could take hold in a democracy: "I see an innumerable crowd of like and equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others."[2] A century and a half later, Jean Baudrillard offered a harsher critique, suggesting that the "number of people here who think alone, sing alone, and eat and talk alone in the streets is mind-boggling. And yet they don't add up. Quite the reverse. They subtract from each other and their

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.
[2] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 663.

resemblance to one another is uncertain."[3] Just like Tocqueville and Baudrillard, Levy was both enamored and confused by America's individualism during his trek across the country. Noting the complexities of Social Security, Levy wrote that "it stems from the methodical individualism that…aims to leave with each individual the responsibility for his fate."[4] There is, in addition, for Levy the absence of real community in the U.S. (except perhaps in Seattle and Savannah), exemplified poignantly in the artificiality of Sun City, Arizona. Concerned with an isolated nation of individuals, Levy, a self-proclaimed anti-anti-Americanist, left the United States concerned about its future.

The United States, it turns out, did not need another Frenchman to detail its ills. Its citizens have known the dangers of their individualism for some time now. David Reisman, for example, touched on the inner-directedness of many Americans in the 1950 intellectual classic—*The Lonely Crowd*.[5] In the 1970s, Richard Sennett suggested that the American people had lost their ability to act in *The Fall of Public Man*.[6] And Robert Bellah and his colleagues argued two decades ago in *Habits of the Heart* that American individualism was putting enough of a strain on community that it threatened the social fabric of the United States:

> Perhaps the crucial change in American life has been that we have moved from the local life of the nineteenth century—in which economic and social relationships were visible and, however imperfectly, morally interpreted as parts of a larger common life—to a society vastly more

[3] Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. Chris Turner (New York: Verso, 1989), 15.
[4] Bernard-Henri Levy, "In the Footsteps of Tocqueville," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2005, 79.
[5] David Reisman, The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
[6] Richard Sennett, *Fall of Public Man* (New York: Norton, 1992).

> interrelated and integrated economically, technically, and functionally. Yet this is a society in which the individual can only rarely and with difficulty understand himself and his activities as interrelated in morally meaningful ways with those of other, different Americans. Instead of directing cultural and individual energies toward relating the self to its larger context, the culture of manager and therapist urges a strenuous effort to make of our particular segment of life a small world of its own.[7]

While they were concerned with America's love of individualism in the early 1980s, Bellah et al. saw the problem as a true crisis twenty years later. This crisis, they argued, stems from a decline in social capital, a weakening of the family, a failure in local governments, and the rise of neocapitalism. In the end, such authors warned that American democracy could not withstand its people turning away from one another.

Since the publication of *Habits of the Heart*, an entire cadre of public intellectuals and statesmen has tried to reverse this trend under the auspices of communitariansim. Guided by the work of Amitai Etzioni, communitarians worried that the separation of individuals in the U.S. would undermine both its shared values and traditional culture. As the communitarian movement has conceived the problem, "Neither human existence nor individual liberty can be sustained for long outside the interdependent and overlapping communities to which all of us belong. Nor can any community long survive unless its members dedicate some of their attention, energy, and resources to shared

[7] Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996).

projects."[8] Worried about the individual's retreat from community, communitarians work to resituate the individual within the moral, social, and political environment of traditional societal norms. They lament the loss of the social connectedness that once existed in the United States and work to create stronger community ties among individuals. They are attempting, in essence, to reinvigorate civic identity.

Has the U.S. truly become as hyper-individualistic, even narcissistic, as so many have suggested? Is the social fabric of the United States tearing? Is a strong sense of civic identity dead? Not everyone is excessively worried. As Michael Schudson has argued recently, "Citizenship in the United States has not disappeared. It has not even declined. It has, inevitably, changed."[9] As Schudson further notes, the American people act in their roles as citizens at many new levels, including "in their homes, schools, and places of employment."[10] According to Schudson, then, the American people are still very much aware of one another. Rhetorical critic Barry Brummett argues the same point when writing that today, "many ordinary citizens are expressing their political involvement through a wide range of local acts, from tying yellow ribbons to trees to marching on state capitols and walking with local Muslims in solidarity as they go to school or the grocery store"[11] For these researchers, community engagement has not disappeared; it has found new ways of manifesting itself. Wearing a yellow bracelet to support the Lance Armstrong Foundation, they argue, creates a sense of community, albeit one that is more fluid and less contingent on the participation of others.

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[8] Amitai Etzioni, *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions and Communities* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1995).
[9] Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 294.
[10] Ibid., 299.
[11] Brummett, "Communities, Identities, and Politics," 298.

Are these defenders of modern citizenship correct? Given the well-documented decrease in voter turnout and increase in social distrust, it is hard to see their point. While the current concern about the strength of connectedness in the United States dates back to the post-World War II boom, the American people are now confronted with specific challenges of community: Has there been a change in how young people in the United States identify with others? Has there been, as the research on social capital suggests, a decline in the number of groups with which individuals identify? Have today's young people truly become islands unto themselves?

While a number of researchers have attempted to answer these questions by counting group affiliations, I take a different approach by looking at how young adults talk about politics and organizations. What I find, in brief, is that while political issues have become increasingly centered on matters once relegated to the private sphere, today's young people are not adverse to joining groups. The types of groups they join, however, are not as other-oriented as past organizations. In the end, young people can be seen as *independent joiners*—individuals who link to others for quite personal reasons. Referring to young people this way is clearly contradictory, but it also seems accurate. In a positive sense, today's young adults are taking care of their own needs. That seems reasonable since, as Chapter Five showed, they have lost their belief that government and other organizations will do what's necessary to help them. Today's youth still understand, however, that they cannot go it completely alone. Despite the fact that they are at odds with themselves, a nation of independent joiners still needs to be understood. Questions of individuals, community, and democracy are as old as democratic thought,

but challenges facing the United States today are uniquely American and temporally bound. Understanding these exceptional circumstances is the first step toward answering the related questions.

America and Individualism

It is one thing to suggest that young people in the United States are becoming more individualistic and quite another to understand why this might be happening. Why have the American people decreased their tendency to come together politically? Much of the work concerned with declining citizenship has argued that television is the primary problem because it takes up more and more of our time, time that might otherwise be spent in social engagement.[12] Others have argued that there are a number of economic factors that have caused people to stand apart. Stanley Deetz has asserted that people have increasingly turned to the workplace for political engagement instead of more natural communities.[13] Still others have suggested that the news media may be presenting a skewed view of the world that is more negative in appearance and that, as a result, leads people to distrust others.[14] Additionally, political scientist Theda Skocpol argues that the increasing specialization of governance has pushed citizens away from political community. She argues that "no longer do civic entrepreneurs think of constructing vast federations and recruiting interactive citizen-members." Instead, Skocpol argues that "when a new cause arises, activists envisage opening a national

[12] See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*; and Brehm and Rahn, "Individual-Level Evidence."
[13] Stanley A. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
[14] Michael Morgan and James Shanahan, "Two Decades of Cultivation Research: An Appraisal and a Meta-Analysis. In B. Burleson (ed.) *Communication Yearbook* 20 (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1996): 1-45.

office and managing association building as national projects from the center."[15] Even Schudson concedes the trend to more individualized notions of citizenship when he asserts that there has been a "profound revolution of rights—a growing inclination of people and organized groups to define politics in terms of rights, a growing willingness of the federal government to enforce individuals' claims to constitutional rights, and a widening of the domain of 'politics' propelled by rights-consciousness."[16] While all of these factors may be playing a role in the increasingly individualistic tendencies of the American people, there are two additional underlying phenomena that have fed hyper-individualization—American liberalism and the postmodern loss of stable identities.

There is no single thread of political thought that has guided the modern American conscience more powerfully than the major tenets of liberalism. Political theorist Louis Hartz staked this position in *The Liberal Tradition in America* when tracing Americans' individualistic tendencies to the liberalist ideas of John Locke.[17] Even those whose positions are meant to counter liberalism concede this point. Feminist theorist Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey assert, for instance, that "it is arguably the case that in the developed countries of the western world contemporary social and political institutions more nearly enshrine liberal values and principles than, say socialist, anarchist, feminists, or even conservative ones."[18] Although there is wide consensus on liberalism's preeminence in political thought in the United States, one does not always

[15] Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 210.
[16] Schudson, *The Good Citizen*, 242.
[17] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York, Harcourt Brace, 1955).
[18] Elizabeth Frazer and Nicola Lacey, *The Politics of Community, A Feminist Critique of the Liberal-Communitarian Debate* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 42.

find agreement on the central themes of liberalism. Following the lead of Charles Taylor, however, I suggest that there are two underlying assumptions that guide modern liberal thinking in the United States: (1) egalitarianism is preferred to social hierarchies and (2) individual rights take precedence over collective rights.[19]

What do we mean by an egalitarian citizenry? The best modern explanation for this phenomenon can be found in Ronald Dworkin's aptly titled essay, *Liberalism*. There, Dworkin argues that societal connections, or the notion of equality, can be seen in two fundamentally different ways: "The first supposes that government must be neutral on what might be called the question of the good life. The second supposes that government cannot be neutral on that question, because it cannot treat its citizens as equal human beings without a theory of what human beings ought to be."[20] Liberalism champions the former of the two distinctions. That is, liberalism holds that all citizens are to be treated equally without government making determinations about what those individuals might value. From this we can see that liberalism seeks to apply to all citizens the same moral standing and to reject any claims—political or legal—to differing levels of moral worth among persons. These points are, of course, the bedrock of many democratic principles. The signers of the Declaration of Independence embraced them when arguing that, "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created

[19] The construction of these three areas is not without precedent, see John Gray's *Liberalism*. Gray argues that there are four basic elements of liberalist thinking: individualism, egalitarianism, universalism, and meliorism. While I agree with much of Gray's analysis, it seems that the last two elements are simply extensions of the first two.

[20] Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in Stuart Hampshire (ed.), *Public and Private Morality* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1978), 64.

equal." As romantic as this sentiment may be, it is a principle that ineluctably leads to a second.

Another distinguishing element of modern American liberalist thought, as Charles Taylor writes, is "that individual rights must always come first, and, along with nondiscrimination provisions, must take precedence over collective goals."[21] This position can be traced more directly to John Rawls's conceptualization of a justice of fairness deeply rooted in equal rights. The individualistic assumptions of liberalism, then, can be derived from its emphasis on equality.

Like Dworkin, Rawls argues from a position that "requires equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties."[22] Rawls fears that the good of the group may come at the expense of the individual: "Since the principle for an individual is to advance as far as possible his own welfare, his own system of desires, the principle for society is to advance as far as possible the welfare of the group, to realize to the greatest extent the comprehensive system of desire arrived at from the desire of its members."[23] Rawls points out here that society, as a collection of individuals, becomes a separate, single identity. A choice must be made, then, as to which should get preference. For Rawls, the choice is the individual. Allen Buchanan points out that Rawls does not deny benefits to society but does fear that social dangers can include "various liabilities, duties,

[21] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 56.
[22] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 14.
[23] Ibid., 23-24.

and obligations."[24] Society, for the proponent of liberalism, must not impede the pursuit of personal happiness. The individual, therefore, may or may not find happiness in giving back to society and must be allowed to pursue his or her personal journey.

Presented as one thought, liberalism is to be understood as a political theory that features the individual's autonomy as the first assumption of any social contract. The biggest concern for liberalism, a concern even some liberalists have tried to correct,[25] is that it leads toward atomization, to an ever-expanding group of isolated individuals. Whether liberalism alone should accept blame for this excessive individualism is not the question here; that liberalism must take some responsibility, in contrast, seems all too evident.

Even as one can track the rise of American individualism to liberalism, postmodern theorist Jean François Lyotard offers another explanation. Writing in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* Lyotard argues that cybernetics (computers, telecommunications, and other mediated technologies) has become the dominant form of communication since World War II. The importance of this observation is that it highlights the changing way individuals gain knowledge. Lyotard asserts that understanding the dominant mode of knowledge production allows one to understand the more basic, day-to-day functioning of society. During the Enlightenment, Western societies understood knowledge as rooted in meta-narratives, any "global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and

[24] Allen Buchanan, A Critical Introduction to Rawls' Theory of Justice, in H. Gene Blocker and Elizabeth H. Smith (eds.), *John Rawls' Theory of Social Justice: An Introduction* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980), 7.
[25] For an example of this rethinking, see Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

experience."[26] Whatever problems metanarratives may produce, they have also been a unifying source for society as a whole.

Lyotard suggests, however, that post-World War II Western societies have lost their ability to believe in these grand narratives. The question becomes, then, how do highly individuated societies find ways to create strong community identities? For Lyotard, the answer lies in Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of how smaller groups within larger societies negotiate norms through linguistic rules. The notion here is that as members of modern states have lost their belief in grand narratives, they have clung to smaller narratives, what Wittgenstein refers to as language games. The individual no longer has a set of standard norms of behavior prescribed by the community. Instead, people today must adapt any number of roles within the constraints of a given social situation. A person's success here is based on how well she can perform a selected identity. Choices and knowledge are no longer based on principles of good and bad. The individual is left to decide what is going to best allow him to achieve his desired goal.

Anthony Giddens has also noted the changing relationship between the individual and what he refers to as high modernity. Giddens argues that factors such as globalization and communications have reduced the individual to an "embattled, minimal self" whose understanding of himself becomes a "reflexive project."[27] This causes, according to Giddens, the individual to spend much of his time producing and

[26] Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
[27] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

reproducing self-narratives. Or as Zygmunt Bauman has argued, the current state of affairs destabilizes the self:

> If the modern problem of identity was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern problem of identity is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. In the case of identity, as in other cases, the catchword of modernity was creation; the catchword of postmodernity is recycling.[28]

In modern, Western societies, such commentators argue, people no longer have a stable sense of self rooted in connections to their communities. Instead, each person faces a multitude of situations in which she must make ever-adapting and individual responses. John Smith is no longer the John Smith of the West Texas Smiths. John Smith has become a smorgasbord of selves—student, husband, son, uncle, bartender, softball player, etc. His identities are rooted in his performances.

How have these changes—rising American liberalism and the destabilizing of metanarratives—affected how young adults have come to understand politics and community? To answer this question, I have paid attention to students' writings on political issues and organizations. The problems that students identify and how they suggest that these problems may be fixed help situate them in the larger political landscape. How they talk about organizations also reveal what they see as the purpose of collective action—the bedrock of a democratic republic.

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[28] Zygmunt Bauman, From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity, in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.) *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: SAGE, 1996), 18-36.

Personalizing Politics

One of the most profound changes on the American political landscape over the past few decades has been the rise of a more personalized politics, due largely to the changing economic and globalizing forces of postmodernity. Anthony Giddens refers to this new politics as "life politics." Giddens' concept "concerns political issues which flow from processes of self-actualization in post-traditional contexts."[29] Given the changing nature of the contemporary world, the individual has been placed in a more direct and individualized political relationship with the world around her. Questions of nuclear power and weapons, for instance, lead today's individual to make personal choices about his energy consumption instead of contacting legislators to voice his concerns or joining a community organization devoted to limiting the building of new nuclear power plants. For Giddens, a life politics is seen as positive since it becomes a politics of choice, a power that "is generative rather than hierarchical." Here, the individual becomes the genesis for the political. This self-actualizing stance makes politics personal but it also causes the personal to become political.

Ulrich Beck has also suggested that most people today engage in a politics that is much more about life choices than community decisions. Beck argues that the changing social conditions of the last several decades has led to a type of individualism that is extremely ambivalent and no longer rooted in the stability of metanarratives."[30] Lance Bennett describes this politicizing of personal issues and choices as a "life-style politics."

[29] Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 214.
[30] Ulrich Beck, *The Reinvention of Politics: Rethinking Modernity in the Global Social Order* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996).

For Bennett, this personalized politics "makes sense within the personal life considerations of job, recreation, shopping, entertainment, fashion, sports, self-improvement, family, friends, and the community involvements that can be scheduled around these things."[31] According to these scholars, politics has become largely about personal issues surrounding race, gender, sexuality, occupation, and other such characteristics. These highly personal issues are subsequently dealt with by collectives only when they benefit the individual, which requires that the groups be fluid in nature. All of this has created, they conclude, highly individualized political engagements, engagements that may be especially suited to young adults.

Many people would suggest, of course, that teenagers are inherently selfish and that they will eventually grow out of it. Teenagers are surely self-involved but it would be wrong to see them as narcissistic. Erik Erickson argues that adolescence is the fifth stage of human development wherein the individual struggles with his personal identity and his role in larger social networks.[32] The ego plays a dominant psychological role during this period and so one can naturally expect to find teenagers internally focused. But as Erickson notes, the adolescent is also concerned with where and how she fits in with others. While high school students are often focused on themselves, psychology suggests that they should be trying to find where they fit into the larger societal scheme. Some teenagers in the 1960s acted selfishly, of course, and some young people in the

[31] W. Lance Bennett, "Branded Political Communication: Lifestyle Politics, Logo Campaigns, and the Rise of Global Citizenship," in *The Politics Behind Products*, Michelle Micheletti, Andreas Follesdal, and Dietlind Stolle, eds. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books,).
[32] Erik H. Erickson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1994).

1990s were overtly concerned with community problems. But the general tendency is that young adults are increasingly focused on personal matters.

Over the past forty years, there has been a clear shift in what young people describe as salient political issues. A quick survey of issues concerning young adults in the 1960s and 70s demonstrates a more community-based understanding—from the effects of poverty on local communities, [33] to the impact of free speech on the American community,[34] and to the war in Vietnam.[35] At Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington D.C., for example, the editorial staff offered a clear example of just how community focused many political issues were for students in the opening years of this study. In a 1966 editorial, for example, the staff discussed a proposed budget plan that listed the funding of a new "Woodrow Wilson field house as number 37 in a list of 37 priorities." While the new building would clearly benefit the students of Wilson High, the editorial staff questioned a number of school officials and students who had been pushing for the budget item to be moved to a higher priority:

> Certainly, the efforts of these organizations for the sorely needed field house should be appreciated. However, we can not help but feel that these efforts have questionable emphasis. If the Wilson field house is moved up on the list, projects of others schools will be lowered and some other need will be number 37, and thus go without funds.[36]

[33] "Walk for Development In Houston," May 8, *The Lancer*, May 7, 1971.
[34] "Freedom Challenge," *The Carrickulum*, Winter, 1968.
[35] "Rams favor war escalation," *Ram Page*, November 10, 1967.
[36] "Back the Budget," *The Beacon*, May 27, 1966.

The political concern presented here is not only clearly about the community, but the students are even aware of the impact on the larger social good. Clearly, they did not want their personal desires to get in the way of what is best for everyone.

More recently, the nature of what constitutes an important problem for young people has shifted from the communal to the personal. This change can be noted in the rise of health issues opened up to public discussion:

- Booze has become an unpaid attendant to our school dances, games and field trips. It's even an unenrolled participant in our "educational climate."[37]
- Nose jobs are becoming increasingly common, and they are no longer confined to androgynous pop stars. In fact, rhinoplasty is a procedure that has gained popularity among teenage girls. That's where it starts to concern us, the astute, well-informed, cosmopolitan South students.[38]
- So what's the big deal; 52 grams of fat. At the prime age of 14 to 18 fat is no concern, that is something to be worried about during a mid-life crisis. Wrong![39]
- Anger is a confusing condition….Realizing how to identify anger is just a matter of communicating and reasoning. Violence should be immediately eliminated; no further pain is necessary.[40]

These textual examples highlight a number of important problems—underage drinking, plastic surgery, obesity, and violence. While each of these problems is certainly

[37] "Alcohol infiltrates school system," *The Grantonian*, November 6, 1992.
[38] "South nose plastic surgery," *Denebola*, September 29, 1998.
[39] "Work Needed on Eating Habits," *The Northmen's Log*, November 13, 1998.
[40] "Anger, a natural feeling; How should you deal with it?," *The Rampage*, November 9, 1993.

something that young people deal with today, that these issues have become more salient than community-oriented problems highlights the individualistic shift that has occurred among American youth.

Discussion of issues focusing on anger, obesity, and sex can be viewed as beneficial to a nation of young people forced to deal with these problems. One might want to treat this openness as a sign that young people are refusing to exclude salient issues from public discourse. After all, a student reading an article in his school newspaper about the devastating effects of depression may come to realize that some of his problems may stem from something other than a temporary malaise. One can even imagine the student who reads this story going to a counselor for advice or getting medication. There is a concern here, however, that these highly personal issues will divert attention from political problems more deeply rooted in community. Students focusing on why they should stop eating red meat to help control their weight and prevent heart disease are not, ipso facto, focused on their state's tax incentives for large cattle farmers. Nor are they going to be aware of how politically motivated the creation of the Food and Drug Administration's food pyramid was or how the national government might change it. This last point has more to do with how young people discuss these personal issues than the nature of the issues themselves.

Rhetorical critic Dana Cloud has argued that Americans have moved into a world of individualized politics as a result of a dominant therapeutic discourse. While Cloud agrees with others that the American people have become increasingly self-interested in the past several decades, she contends that the shift is a result of "the therapeutic as a

political strategy of contemporary capitalism, by which potential dissent is contained within a discourse of individual and family responsibility."[41] Cloud found, for instance, that a therapeutic discourse emerged around the Persian Gulf War that helped create a sense of support for Americans but that that discursive support may have also detracted from a more critical and engaged dialogue about the war effort. Cloud's concern is that this rhetoric of therapy depoliticizes political problems in the United States (e.g., race, class, gender) by encouraging an "identification with therapeutic values: individualism, familism, self-help, and self-absorption."[42] If Cloud is right, one might well ask if young people have learned to speak such a rhetoric. They have indeed.

One clear example can be seen in young people's concerns about smoking. Discussing the issue of smoking in high school, one angry student at Newton South High School complained that the no-smoking rule was not being enforced in 1966. In making his argument that the rule should be applied rigorously, he suggested that "though it was hoped that it might help students quit the habit, the main purpose is to prevent fire hazards. It also is supposed to help keep the school and its grounds neat and smelling clean."[43] While the student here understands the personal health issues related to smoking, his main concern is on how the issue might have a negative impact on the entire school community.

Thirty years later, the concerns students have with smoking have completely reversed themselves. In an editorial to *The Carrickulum* at Pittsburgh's Carrick High

[41] Dana L. Cloud, *Control and Consolation in American Culture and Politics* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1998), xiii.
[42] Ibid., 2.
[43] "Smoke Smoldering South's Students Smoker's Haven," *Denebola*, March 24, 1966.

School, one student presented an argument against a new state law that made it a crime for a minor to be caught in possession of tobacco products. After complaining that the law was unfair and that students should be allowed to smoke outside the school, the editorialist then suggested how smoking should be dealt with:

> Educational classes on the effects of smoking will help guide minors into the right direction. No one wants to die from cancer or get emphysema, so most likely the right choice would be selected. As for the minors that smoke now, they have already shown that they will not stop smoking. The only way they will quit is when they themselves decide to quit.[44]

This student's concern is not with the impact of smoking on the school or community. Instead, he asserts that all individuals, given the right information, should be able to make their own decisions and that that is their right.

Young people today could, of course, discuss the problems of smoking in a number of other ways. They could examine local policies on teenage smoking and determine whether or not those policies were being enforced. They could explore how the tobacco industry has systematically targeted teenagers through creative marketing strategies and product placement. They could also attempt to understand the number of recent legal battles over whether tobacco companies can be held accountable by smokers who develop cancer and what the government has done to help or hinder these lawsuits. They could come to understand, that is, that smoking is a collective issue. Instead, they

[44] "Circumstances Should Sustain Smoking for Students," *The Carrickulum*, November 3, 1997.

increasingly see it as a personal problem and therefore focus on individual impact, individual blame, and individual choice.

Three articles on the problem of teen parenting further illustrate such tendencies. Under the heading "Features," the January 2002 Carrick High School newspaper presents three stories: "A Day in the Life of a Teen Father," "A Day in the Life of a Teen Mother," and "My parents no longer control me, my children do." The first two stories were written by the student-parent and both cover the difficulties of a daily routine that tries to balance school, work and parenting. The third article is attributed to an anonymous author who had her first child during her senior year and who subsequently had another child after graduating from high school. All three authors offer personal accounts of how having a child while still in high school has impacted their lives. While the stories are clearly framed as warnings for other students, the paper does not discuss larger social issue related to teen sex, such as the school's birth control policy or the community's resources for young parents. Teen pregnancy becomes an individual problem with individual implications.

As young people have come to see political issues as personal in nature, they have subsequently placed blame for the problems on individuals as well. Discussing the dangers of drinking and driving, one Newton South student even questioned the actions of Princess Diana that led to her death:

> The driver of the car in which [Princess Diana] drove had been drinking before driving. Instead of staying in one place, she chose to get in the car with a drunk driver. Perhaps if she had questioned her mortality and

> stayed at dinner for a little bit longer, it may have turned out differently. Many face similar situations in their lifetime, and surprisingly many people make the risky choice. Drugs and alcohol have become part of many young people's lives, affecting everyone in some way….People must remember, however, that they are not immortal and should act responsibly, not risking their lives for something as simple as a ride home.[45]

Princess Diana's death is seen here as a direct result of her poor personal decision-making. The article's author did not question the need for better public transportation, the restaurant's responsibility, or even that the government might enforce existing laws more stringently to reduce the numbers of drunken driving fatalities. Instead, the author places the full blame on the individual.

In the end, young Americans now see the solution to many political problems as the ability to make better personal choices. While the impact of drugs on the nation could be discussed in terms of legal issues and socioeconomic concerns, young people by the late 1980s did not look in those directions. As a result, the solution to the drug problem was not seen as stronger penalties for drug offenders or a better public education system in low income areas. Instead, individuals are urged to make better decisions:

> More adolescents are being faced with the choice of cocaine due to lower prices and easy access. Life provides a variety of choices. One leads himself either to success or failure. One choice gaining rapid recognition

[45] "Unnecessary risks sometimes lead to tragic consequences," *Denebola*, November 20, 1997.

> is the decision of whether or not to partake in America's number one major social and health problem—the problem of cocaine. When faced with so many choices in life, why make the choice that could ruin a future?[46]

Although this student hints at economic issues and frames the problem as a national one, the only solution the student identifies is personal in nature. The way to solve the drug problem in America is to make individuals understand that they are responsible for making better choices. Nancy Reagan seems to have understood this when telling young Americans to "Just Say No."

Even when discussing elections, young people have moved from describing voting as a communal responsibility to one rooted in individual choice. In a 1972 editorial calling for young people to vote, one student at Washington High School in Phoenix began by questioning why "only one-third of those under twenty who were eligible to vote did" so in the 1968 election.[47] The editorial then went on to argue that while some believed young Americans had become selfish, "many young people prefer to believe that we do really care, that we have merely lost our faith in politicians who say one thing and do another, and in a system which appears to offer few real choices." While the argument does focus on personal choice in part, the piece continues by asserting that the individual has a clear *responsibility* to vote in the upcoming election: "If you truly want peace, and end to poverty and pollution, now is the time to do something about it. Tomorrow when posterity asks why, when you had the chance to

[46] "Cocaine: A decision of life and death," *The Ram Page*, October 19, 1988.
[47] "Youth must vote," *Ram Page*, October 6, 1972.

change the future, you ignored it, it will be too late!" According to the youth of the early 1970s, voting is a communal responsibility.

By the early 1990s, the reasoning behind voting has shifted in a more personalized direction. Writing in *The Northmen's Log*, one student suggests that being a citizen of the United States entitles one to a number of important privileges and that "voting is one of those privileges." She continues by making the following argument:

> It is easy to sit back and complain about the candidates and the issues. If you aren't interested enough to become active and informed, you are cheating yourself….The democratic process is not flawless by any means, but it is a way for your to be involved in the decision making process of your country….Learn as much as you can about the issues. Make your own decisions.

This more contemporary argument about voting is clearly rooted in the individual's personal blameworthiness. The individual is also warned to not "abuse" their personal voting privilege. In the end, young people are told the public act of voting is a distinctly personal issue.

Today's young adults appear to overlook the communal impact of the issues that concern them. Nor do they seem to understand how a community might become more effective in solving its problems. Instead, politics has become personal for them. Personal states of being have turned into political problems and society-wide problems are the result of poor individual decision-making.

In reality, political problems are often frustratingly difficult to fix. Psychologists discovered almost a century ago that people often have one of three responses to frustration. They can respond *impunitively* in an attempt to gloss over the frustration and pretend it is not there. They can blame others in an act of *extrapunitive* attribution or they can take the opposite route and produce an *impunitive* response, blaming themselves for the frustration. None of these responses, psychologists argue, is helpful when responding to most frustrations, which inevitably arise from a number of complicated factors. When today's young people do pay attention to politics, they have learned to blame others for their failed personal attitudes and behaviors. The purpose of community and social networks, in contrast, has been to get individuals to think outside of this dichotomous and lonely world of individual politics. Increasingly, young adults have found it hard to identify these collective remedies.

Self-Interested Groups

Politics is, at root, about community resources. It is, therefore, also about the need to share those resources with other people. Political scientists have been worried for some time now about the lack of contact many Americans have with their neighbors, what scholars today refer to as a lack of social capital. Political Scientist Robert Putnam has made this work famous in his book, *Bowling Alone*. According to Putnam, social capital is a way of understanding how individuals come together in networks or groups, "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."[48] The assumption here is that for society (especially a democratic society) to

[48] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 19.

flourish there must exist a series of social connections that brings individuals together. Putnam's notion is, of course, not new. As political theorist James Farr has recently noted, there is a long history in democratic political thought concerning the importance of groups and associations of free citizens, including such divergent thinkers as John Dewey and Karl Marx.[49] And America's ability to create and foster such connections has been a matter of concern since the time of Tocqueville.

What is unique about Putnam's thesis is how well documented the decline in social capital has been over the past half century in the United States. As Putnam's book title indicates, Americans have increasingly lost their ties to various social groups—they have begun bowling alone instead of together in leagues. By examining the membership of national charter-based organizations across the twentieth century, Putnam found that average membership declined by almost half between 1960 and 1997. Across that same time period, church attendance has declined by approximately ten percent, and work-related organizations (e.g., American Nurses Association, American Society of Mechanical Engineers, American Bar Association) followed a similar trend. As these declines in organization membership declined, so too did the percentage of Americans who believed that their neighbors were honest and moral. People have lost their connections with others, Putnam argues further, even as there has been an overall loss in interpersonal trust.

With that loss, there is also the assertion that the American people have been doing less and less with others. American civic life, then, is characterized by Putnam as

[49] James Farr, "Social Capital: A conceptual history," *Political Theory* 31 (2003): 1-28,

being filled with individuals who do not care to join with others and who would not trust them if they did. While Putnam has repeatedly argued that individuals today are less likely to join organizations such as the PTA, Elks Club, or the Rotary Club, he has more recently suggested that people's alienation from one another runs much deeper:

> Many of our social connections…are reflected not in formal organizations but in informal leisure activities—having friends over for dinner, hanging out in bars, gossiping with neighbors, playing cards….Several independent survey archives show that virtually all these forms of social capital have also badly eroded during the last several decades. Entertaining friends at home fell by about 30-40 percent, as did going out to bars and other night spots, or spending an evening with the neighbors, or playing cards, or playing a musical instrument. Despite the trendiness of health and fitness, participation in sports has fallen over this period, especially team sports.[50]

This tendency to do little with one another has been also true of today's younger generations. Over the past ten years, a cottage industry of social capital research has appeared in the areas of political science and communication. Most important for the current study, much of this work has pointed to the generational differences in the decline of social capital. As Dhavan Shah and his co-authors have argued, the declining trends in social capital "appear to be based as much on generational differences as individual

[50] Robert D. Putnam, Community-Based Social Capital and Educational Performance, in Diane Ravitch & Joseph P. Viteritti (eds.), *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 61.

changes—that is, cohort and life-cycle effects—with 'Gen-Xers' being less participatory, trusting and satisfied than their 'Baby Boomer' parents, who themselves are less connected and involved than members of the preceding 'Civic Generation' were as young people."[51] According to this research, today's young people are less politically engaged than those of any preceding generation.

Not everyone agrees with Putnam's thesis. Michael Schudson, for instance, responded to Putnam's original argument by suggesting that Putnam had missed a number of places where today's Americans do engage in community activities. Two of Schudson's arguments are especially worth investigating. First, Schudson suggests that "people may have left the middling commitment of the League of Women Voters or the PTA for organized activity both much less and much more involving."[52] For instance, individuals may be participating in multiple groups within their churches and other individuals may not view their church attendance as qualifying for group membership at all. Second, Schudson also argues that "people may be more episodically involved in political and civic activity as issue-oriented politics grows." To make this point, Schudson points to loosely organized bikers in California who formed a powerful politically motivated group in the early 1990s. So who is correct? Are today's young people less likely to join one another in groups and organizations? The answer to this question is no, but the groups they have formed have changed.

[51] Dhavan V. Shah, Nojin Kwak, and R. Lance Holbert, Patterns of Internet Use and the Production of Social Capital, *Political Communication* 18 (2001): 141-162.
[52] Michael Schudson, "What if Civic Life Didn't Die?," *The American Prospect* 25 (1996): 17-20.

Looking at the clubs and organizations discussed in the high school newspapers from the early years of this study, one finds a number of familiar organizations—DECA, Key Club, etc. What is important to note about these organizations is not merely that they exist but the purpose they served for young people in the 1960s and 70s. The clubs discussed at that time had one primary function—to prepare American youth for an industrious future. In 1969, for instance, some of the students at Pittsburgh's Carrick High School had the opportunity to attend a conference sponsored by the Key Club. The article on the conference asserts that the "purpose of this leadership conference is to provide worthwhile activities to assist youth in leadership development as they prepare to be marketing and distribution leaders of tomorrow."[53] At Phoenix's Washington High School, students participated actively in Future Farmers of America (FFA). In reporting on an upcoming FFA club event at Washington High, the school newspaper reported that "money raised from the show will be used to finance the annual FFA Parents-Son Banquet, and to operate the chapter's nine acre farm. The club also plans to build a plastic greenhouse on campus for tomatoes."[54] Other organizations mentioned included the French Club and FTA. And in Portland, a report on the FTA organization suggested that "one of the highlights of belonging to Future Teachers of America is being able to be a teacher aid" and learn the skills needed for a future in education.[55] What ties these organizations together, of course, is that they are top-down in nature. That is, the clubs

[53] "Carrick Deca Competes," *The Carrickulum*, Winter 1969.
[54] "FFA to crown sweetheart at horse show," *Ram Page*, November 10, 1967.
[55] "Future Teachers plan excursion to Stayton—'as FTA highlight,'" *The Grantonian*, February 13, 1970.

and groups which students joined in the early years of this study were largely created by adults.

Over time, two important things happened to the organizational lives of the young people studied here—the number of clubs in each school doubled on average and the types of clubs they joined took on new purposes. Looking at Pittsburgh's Carrick High School as an example, a 1972 issue of the newspaper catalogued all of the clubs active in the school at the time. The list included 24 school groups, which ranged from an Art Club to the Red Cross. According to the Carrick High School website, the number of school clubs more than doubled by 2005 despite the fact that the school's population had declined slightly across the same time period. While student groups such as DECA and Student Council remained visible after forty years, newer organizations emerged, groups as varied as the Ski Club to a school chapter of the Health Occupations Students of America (HOSA). Simply put, in recent years young people created and joined any number of organizations. While it is impossible to gain from the newspapers a sense of how many students joined which groups or the number of informal associations that existed within each school, it is clear that the ability of students to organize together has not diminished over time although the types of groups they have joined have indeed changed.

Beyond the growing number of student groups that emerged in the 1990s, there has also been a shift in the types of groups that surfaced. While the groups of the 1960s and '70s were primarily designed to help students become productive members of society after graduating, the newer organizations support more immediate interests and needs of

the students themselves. Overall, three types of groups have gained in popularity. These are groups that focus on specific student issues, activities, and social diversity.

The one group that has been especially popular among youth over the past two decades has been SADD. The organization which was created to fight alcohol related deaths among young adults was quick to make its way into schools throughout the nation in the late 1980s. Unlike organizations from earlier decades, SADD membership requires little from one as an article from Pittsburgh's *Carrickulum* suggests: "Another year has begun for Students Against Driving Drunk, and once again the members of the SADD club have begun to talk to the student body about drinking and driving. October is SADD awareness month, so students are wearing red ribbons to represent this organization."[56] Beyond talking, wearing ribbons, and making pledges, the student members of SADD are required to do little else, and the national organization has been quick to adjust to changing times. As an article in *The Northmen's Log* demonstrates, both a new name and an inventive approach has helped the organization stay salient in the lives of young adults. The students in Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) at Oak Park High School in Kansas City started putting on a yearly Grim Reaper Day in the late 1990s to highlight that death due to drunk driving occur every 32 minutes.[57]

Although SADD is a national organization with charter groups in most high schools, today's students have learned how to create issue-oriented clubs themselves. The events of September 11th led to one such example at Grant High School in Portland.

[56] "SADD takes action against drinking," *The Carrickulum*, November 1, 1996.
[57] "SADD cancels drinking awareness event," *The Northmen's Log*, April 29, 2005.

Students looking for a way to help those directly impacted by the terrorist attacks decided to come together to pool their resources:

> So was born the latest club available to Grant students: Youth Helping in Times of Crisis….The result was a list that included a money drive, a supplies drive, a college scholarship program for students who lost their parents, having elementary school children draw cards to be sent to the injured and morning, and button sales. Students volunteered to support the various activities by organizing, contacting businesses and elementary schools, and bringing in coin jars.[58]

The organization described here is primarily focused on raising money and the membership requirements are as simple as bringing in jars to hold money. While the group's purpose is commendable (and one should be quick to praise the students for their active response), that the group lasted less than a year demonstrates just how fluid such groups and their memberships can be for young adults today.

In addition to issue-oriented groups, activity clubs have also gained traction over the past twenty years. Activity clubs have long been a part of high school, of course, and these organizations (e.g., Chess Club) have remained a fixture at many schools. What has occurred during the past twenty years is an increase in the number of organizations students have created to promote and support their interests. In many instances, these groups are focused on athletics and are not sponsored by the schools themselves. At Washington High School, for instance, the students organized a badminton team to

[58] "Club rises from tragedy," *The Grantonian*, September 28, 2001.

compete with other school teams, although the district did not officially sanction the sport.[59] And at Carrick High School, the students started one club with an announcement in the paper: "If you are looking for a fun and interesting sport to play, play paintball….Paintball meetings are held Tuesdays before students go out to play."[60] In addition to athletic-oriented organizations, students have also added to the number of groups in schools by forming clubs around their artistic interests. In Boston, the students organized an informal group of fans that attended the yearly concerts of the band Phish. They even felt the need to tell their peers about their encounter: "the Newton South Phish contingent is very small in number, but high in spirit. We all congregated at the Worcester Centrum for three shows, starting Friday, November 28 and ending Sunday, November 30."[61] At Grant High School, "a group of students who met after school" created Guerrilla Theater to work on improvisational acting since the school did not provide a class for those interests. The club was happy to report its successes, although the group had "changed to focus more on making productions."[62] These interest-oriented groups are, by and large, few in number and highly tailored to the changing needs of their members. They also demonstrate that young people may indeed be bowling together in interesting new ways.

One final type of organization that has emerged during the past twenty years is a collection of groups that celebrates difference. Given the rise of multi-culturalism following the civil rights movement in the United States, one may not be surprised to find

[59] "Badminton keeps eye on birdie," *The Rampage*, October 6, 2000.
[60] "Ready, aim, fire (splat!)," *The Carrickulum*, December 11, 1998.
[61] "Phish jams with faithful fans at concern series," *Denebola*, December 23, 1997.
[62] "What is Guerrilla Theater," *The Grantonian*, December 17, 1998.

schools promoting diversity. That the students have taken to forming their own groups around these diverse identities may be somewhat unexpected. These student organizations cover, moreover, a wide range of issues. At Wilson High School in Washington D.C., for instance, gender is the key denominator in the "Teen Woman in Action (TWA), a program started by the Young Women's Project, [which] is a club designed to improve the skills of and provide support for women in order to build them into teen leaders."[63]

Another important club demographic is race. At Lamar High School in Houston, students formed a cross-cultural group in the early 1990s. The Lamar Multi-Ethnic Committee's "purpose [was] to promote cross-cultural understanding through the arts and contancts among the different ethnic groups represented at Lamar."[64] And at Grant High School, one group of students created the Unity Club which was "made up of people who wanted to share their culture."[65] These rather savvy students introduced their group to the school community by helping to sponsor the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. assembly in January 2000. Sexual orientation has also emerged as something around which students have formed associations. In the late 1990s, the students at Newton South in this progressive suburb of Boston formed the Gay/Straight Alliance to discuss issues impacting the lives of those in the GLBT community. As the organization notes, anyone is welcome to join and there are no requirements for membership.

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[63] "Wilson Women's Group Working to Improve Wilson's Appearance and Attitude," *The Beacon*, January 31, 2005.
[64] "We are the World," *The Lamar Lancer*, April 1991.
[65] "MLK assembly carries inspiration for the future, introduces the Unity Club," *The Grantonian*, January 20, 2000.

The one final demographic around which students organize is religion. In recounting the club history of their school, the student reporters on the Carrickulum argue that "We cannot forget the groups that help young men and women grow, otherwise known as Phenomenal Females and Boyz to Men. They are popular clubs that some teens find to help them out of trouble and other predicaments."[66] And the students at Newton South participated in an annual group meeting:

> On September 16, at 7 AM before classes and during J-Block, Christian students at South gathered around the school flagpole. They joined millions of other teenagers across the nation and the world in prayer for their teachers, school officials, families, friends, and government. This was the eighth annual See You at the Pole (SYATP) day, a day of national student prayer.[67]

In each case, the students meet as a group to share feelings that need to be validated and celebrated. These clubs are not so much about others or the future as they are about problems associated with a complex and fragmenting identity.

Given the array of clubs with which young people are associated, today's high school students are clearly able to join together. These newer clubs and organizations are not, however, the same types of entities seen in previous generations. While the earlier organizations were created primarily by teachers and adults, the newer groups are often created by the students themselves to fulfill a highly particular need. The groups one finds in today's high schools have taken on an inward focus, thereby requiring very little

[66] "Happy Go Lucky Club to Alien Talk; clubs over time," *The Carrickulum,*
[67] "Students come together to pray," *Denebola,* September 29, 1998.

commitment from their members. In the end, these newer organizations seem more therapeutic than political in nature.

Conclusion

The question of just how individualistic young Americans have become in the past several decades is not an easy one to answer, and the conclusions presented in this chapter are not definitive. What is clear is that political issues have become increasingly confused with individual issues. What constitutes a political issue for today's young adult (e.g., obesity) was considered personal forty years ago. And a number of political issues that might once have been discussed in terms of their collective implications (e.g., drinking and driving) have increasingly become understood as personal failures. There is not, however, any reason to believe that today's young people are sitting at home by themselves watching television and mindlessly chatting with people they will never meet. Today's youth are social creatures.

Young adults are not, however, as politically active as they once were. They tend not to act together to achieve ends for formal, established communities. William Damon has referred to this phenomenon as a dedication gap. Discussing a number of in-depth interviews with American adolescents conducted in 1999, Damon offers the following summation:

> What struck us was not only what these young people said but also what they did not say. They showed little interest in people outside their

> immediate circles of friends and relatives (other than fictional media characters and entertainment and sports figures); little awareness of current events; and virtually no expressions of social concern, political opinion, civic duty, patriotic emotion, or sense of citizenship in any form.[68]

As Damon notes here, the problem is not that young adults have no social ties but that their social ties are limited to a small number of personal connections. Today's young people tend not to think of their roles in the larger community and, indeed, have a hard time even imagining a larger community.

Public intellectual Cornel West sees the problem of American youth as one of possessive individualism versus democratic individuality. For West, this notion of democratic individuality can be seen through "the Emersonian tradition [which] emphasizes the vital role of a citizen's individual commitment to democracy and highlights the vast potentials of American democracy."[69] Democracy needs a community of individual citizens, he argues, people who are personally committed to coming together for the greater good. The United States has become, according to West, rooted in a troubling state of individualism. He argues that this new individualism stems from a number of problems, including the media and "the uninspiring nature of our political culture [that] has only enhanced the seductiveness of the pursuit of pleasure and of

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[68] William Damon, "To Not Fade Away: Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young," in *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society*, Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti, eds., (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 124.

[69] Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 86.

diverting entertainments, and too many of us have turned inward to a disconnected, narrowly circumscribed family and social life."[70]

While West's distinction is useful, another way of seeing the problem with today's youth is to understand it as a difference between democratic individuality and postmodern fragmentation. To argue that young adults have become obsessed with themselves does not give them credit for the attempts they are making at community-building. Young people, as was shown above, do come together in numerous ways. The troubling aspect of the groups they join, however, is that they are inwardly focused. Today's young adults join groups that ask little of them even as they offer them important therapeutic benefits. In this sense, young people have become *independent joiners*, people who link arms for non-group reasons.

The United States has always been rooted in individualism but it has historically been counterbalanced by connections to larger communities—towns, states, regions, and nation. These communities, as John Freie has argued, are "not formed by people who get together and agree to sign their names to a document to form a community; rather, they are created over time as people form connections with each other, develop trust and respect for each other, and create a sense of common purpose."[71] The most salient problem for today's young people is that they have lost their sense of common purpose. Due to the economic wealth Americans have enjoyed since World War II and the revolutionary changes in communications technologies that have come on board,

[70] Ibid., 65.
[71] John F. Freie, *Counterfeit Community: The Exploitation of Our Longings for Connectedness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 21.

America's youth now find themselves in a world that no longer accepts meta-narratives to build stronger community ties. Instead, young people have formed more fragmented communities—smaller, more fluid, and more targeted connections. This may be helpful in a multicultural society but it does not contribute to community cohesion in clear and direct ways.

And this "independent joiner" mentality has deep roots, even among those organizations working to increase youth participation. A recent get-out-the-vote campaign run by the Ad Council highlights just how ingrained this mentality has become. The campaign focuses on political apathy and characterizes young people who do not vote as mannequins:

> It's an all too familiar story. There is a young man or woman who is very busy all the time. So busy that he or she has no time to volunteer, stay current on the news, or even vote. Our young specimen is so busy that when it comes to participating in the community, this person is essentially a mannequin. And then it happens: Little by little the person *actually turns into a mannequin.* How can this be?[72]

The campaign's website even offers a survey to help the young person find out if he or she is suffering from mannequinism. The survey offers a series of questions that ask whether or not the individual is registered to vote, has voted in recent elections, has volunteered or donated money, reads or watches the news, and discusses current events with friends and family. No where does the survey ask if the individual belongs to civic

[72] Mannequinism: An In-depth report. http://www.fightmannequinism.org/indepthreport/index.asp.

organizations. The implied assumption here is that the answer is already known. The Ad Council, moreover, does not ask for membership or any commitments, offering little more than a network of web sites and a weekly mailing list. The campaign seeks to get young people voting (a praiseworthy cause) but does nothing to actually bring them together.

As a fragmented group, today's young adults are left to piece together strands of community. Scholars and politicians can accuse young people of being narcissistic or they can view young adults' attempts to build social networks as an implicit longing for community. Young people today are not isolated integers unconcerned with their place in the larger society. Instead, they are a group of individuals trying to find themselves in a changing world, pulling together as many connections as they can. In the closing lines of the prophetic poem *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot wrote, "These fragments I have shored against my ruins." Today's young adults, it seems, are doing what they can to stave off the forces that threaten to separate them but, as seen in this chapter, they seem unsure how to accomplish that goal.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Whither Civic Identity?

Mama don't let your babies grow up to be cowboys/They'll never stay home and they're always alone.—Willie Nelson

In his most recent novel, Ian McEwan follows his protagonist, Henry Perowne, through the course of one day in his life. Because McEwan's take is fictional, it contains the usual concerns with love and sex, family and friends, happiness and failure, life and death. Because it was written post 9/11, the fictional day is an eventful one—there is a burning plane flying over London to start the morning, an altercation with three seedy thugs during an anti-war protest, and a dramatic run-in with a would-be terrorist. One of the central themes of the novel is to question the appropriate response to terrorism. There is also, however, a deeper concern that seems to tie the story together. It is this question: How do we humans know right from wrong, truths from falsehoods? McEwan handles this question by contrasting Henry, an aging neurosurgeon and an expert in his field, with his daughter, a young writer with her first book of poems on the way. He pits science against art, logic versus emotion.

Henry's daughter, Daisy, gives voice to the belief that poetry notices and judges life, balancing "itself on the pinprick of the moment," and that "people can't live without stories."[1] Daisy believes truth resides in the emotional insights art provides. Henry offers the antithesis in a number of ways. He revels in the scientific precision of his work and is mostly indifferent to the people on whom he operates. He defensively admits that

[1] Ian McKewan, *Saturday* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005), 129.

he has always preferred the "better-honed prose" of William James to that of his "fussy brother who would run round a thing a dozen different ways than call it by its name."[2] And in a moment of frustration over the negative portrayal of modern life by young, dramatic college lecturers, he argues that "In fact, everyone he's passing now along this pleasantly down-at-heel street looks happy, at least as content as he is. But for the professor in the academy, for the humanities generally, misery is more amenable to analysis: happiness is a harder nut to crack."[3] Unlike his daughter, Henry finds that science and logic offer more dependable insights. So who, in the end, is right in their assumptions about the world? Neither. And both.

Academics can be religious in their convictions—from both the left and right—and McEwan has a suggestion for all. In answer to one of the novel's central concerns (how people should respond to the religious zealotry of terrorists), McEwan suggests a middle ground, a necessary blending of science and humanities. I too have tried to take the middle ground in this study. I have tried to avoid being falsely scientific or gratuitously humanistic since both logic and feelings can be deceiving. This study, then, has taken on a social scientific tone but is rooted in rhetorical analysis. This may seem a hopeless incompatibility to some. I also worked hard to ignore the overly determined convictions detrimental to good research wherein the answers precede the questions. This study began, then, with just two simple assumptions: that the world has changed dramatically in the last half century and that everyone has a civic identity. With these presuppositions in hand, I have tried to avoid the simplistic reasoning that zealotry

[2] Ian McEwan, Saturday, 56.
[3] Ian McEwan, Saturday, 77-78.

invites—that citizenship among young people in the United States is beyond hope or that American democracy is alive and well and that no one need worry about it. The truth, I believe, is more complicated and lies somewhere in between.

This study has been guided by a belief that everyone has a civic identity—*a sense of self emerging from one's response to community demands, to the processes of governance, and to the recognition of power relations*. Few people in the United States live in isolation. The United States is, in fact, undeniably a nation of city-dwellers. Less than twenty percent of Americans live outside metropolitan areas today, compared to more than thirty percent just thirty years ago.[4] Given this increasing urbanization, it seemed only natural to assume that people must respond to the communities in which they live, work, and socialize.

The American people are also members of other communities, most notably the nation itself. In 2001, one could feel the palpable nationalistic fervor following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. For at least a short time, everyone inside the United States was simply an American. But the longer story is more complicated. Today's Americans are also members of online communities, some that are specifically designed to connect individuals with one another. To date, more than seven and a half million people currently attending college or high school in the United States are members of the popular Facebook community.[5] The more open site Friendster boasts more that twenty-seven million online profiles.[6] And campaigns and political parties are quickly getting

[4] United States Census. http://www.census.gov (accessed on June 10, 2006).
[5] Facebook. http://www.facebook.com/about.php (accessed on June 10, 2006).
[6] Friendster. http://www.friendster.com/index.php (accessed on June 10, 2006).

involved online as well. Despite the concerns of many researchers fearing the total loss of community in the U.S., the American people participate in a smorgasbord of communities.

The research presented in the previous chapters was also guided by a belief that the West has undergone a number of important changes during the last half century. These changes, I have suggested, can be understood under the umbrella term postmodernity. While any periodization of history is problematic, many believe that over the past few decades the U.S. and other Western industrialized nations have undergone a major cultural transformation. Political theorist Frederick Jameson has argued, for instance, that the case of postmodernism "depends on the hypothesis of some radical break or coupure, generally traced back to the end of the 1950s or the early 1960s."[7] Jameson traces these changes to a shift in global economic structure rooted in the United States. And political scientist Ronald Inglehart has echoed Jameson's assertion through an analysis of the World Values Surveys of 43 nations. Inglehart ultimately concluded that:

> In advanced industrial societies the prevailing direction of development is shifting from Modernization to Postmodernization. This new trajectory brings declining emphasis on the functional rationality that characterized industrial society, and increasing emphasis on self-expression and the quality of life….It reflects a shift in what people want out of life. It is

[7] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 1.

> transforming basic norms governing politics, work, religion, family, and sexual behavior.[8]

While I might take issue with Ingehart's assertion that people's values have caused the postmodern shift, it seems relatively certain that major cultural and economic changes have occurred in the past half century. In this study, I have paid particular attention to four areas of postmodernism that have been salient since the early 1950s: globalization, commodification, communications, and the rise of individualism.

To get some sense of how people's civic identities have responded to these social changes, this project has asked the following questions:

> (1) What unique role does civic identity play in an individual's life?
>
> (2) Given this role, are there multiple manifestations of civic identity among a given population?
>
> (3) Have the dominant rhetorical manifestations of civic identity changed over the course of late-modernity?
>
> (4) If changes are found, can these differences be reasonably connected to causal factors resulting from changes (e.g., varying economic structure, demographic differences, specific events) in society at large?

To answer these questions, I looked at the language of young adults.

One could study civic identity in any number of groups, but an especially illuminating way to do so is to look at young people, a group that is actively engaged in

[8] Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 324.

constructing their identities. As research over the past few decades in developmental psychology has suggested, identity is a concept used to explain how individuals come to think of themselves during the adolescent years. Identity construction is, accordingly, "integrating into a coherent whole one's past experiences, ongoing personal changes, and society's demands and expectations for one's future."[9] While identity is not a static concept, James Marcia has argued that the foundational formation of identity occurs during adolescence.[10] These formative years, then, offer a special opportunity to examine the civic identity construct as it is being hammered out by young people in their day-to-day affairs.

Having decided on where to examine civic identity, I created a series of critical probes to uncover what youth are saying. Relying on a number of consistent themes in political science and communication research, these probes permitted a systematic approach to the 15,000 pages of school newspapers that became the focus of this study. As Chapter Two laid out in detail, the critical probes focused on eight major areas of concern. Because civic identity is a construct focused on how individuals negotiate their community relations, one set of probes focused on the *sites of community* that young people identified, while another group of questions examined what *group networks* they talked about (building on the work done by Robert Putnam and others exploring the importance of social capital).[11]

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[9] Norman A. Sprinthall and W. Andrew Collins, *Adolescent Psychology: A Developmental View* (New York: McGaw-Hill, 1994).
[10] James E. Marcia, "Identity in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Joseph Adelson, ed. (New York: Wiley, 1980).
[11] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

Civic identity is also concerned with how individuals participate in the communities with which they identify. Research has focused on a number of important indicators for participation that the critical probes also took into account. With scholars having determined that the more information one has the more likely that person is to vote,[12] questions were also created to explore *political knowledge*. In addition, probes were used to uncover young people's *ideological positioning*, with Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba having demonstrated the importance of political attitudes over four decades ago.[13] Along with these two important participatory indicators, I also keyed on *political trust* and *political efficacy*. While both constructs play an important role in social capital research, keeping them separated was necessary to gain a more nuanced understanding of civic identity. Research has shown in recent years, after all, that political trust is key to one's willingness to engage one's fellow citizens and governmental representatives[14] and that political efficacy can predict actual participation.[15]

The two final sets of critical probes were designed to step outside of the more traditional political science research and look for other indicators of civic identity. In being concerned with *political affect*, I attempted to incorporate research focused on the role emotions play in how and why individuals respond to political and civic concerns,[16] with political psychologists having recently uncovered complex systems of affective responses that precede attitude formation and political action.[17] The final area of concern

[12] Delli Carpini and Keeter, *What Americans Know*; and Zaller, *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*.
[13] Almond and Verba, *Civic Culture*.
[14] Heatherington, *Why Trust Matters*.
[15] Abramson and Aldrich, "The Decline of Electoral Participation."
[16] Kinder, "Reason and Emotion."
[17] Huddy and Gunnthorsdottir, "The Persuasive Effects."

for the study of civic identity was *motive ascription*. This is, on whom does the individual place blame and to whom does he or she direct praise? Knowing who gets blamed when things are going poorly and praised when things are turning out well tells us where the individual locates power.

Armed with these critical probes, I turned my attention to the texts chosen for this study. To get a clear sense of how young people have been expressing their civic identities, seven high school newspapers published across the United States were collected, archived, and examined:

- *The Beacon*, Wilson High School, Washington, D. C.
- *The Carrickulum*, Carrick High School, Pittsburgh, PA
- *Denebola*, South Newton High School, Boston, MA
- *The Grantonian*, Grant High School, Portland, OR
- *The Lamar Lancer*, Lamar High School, Houston, TX
- *The Northmen's Log*, Oak Park High School, Kansas City, MO
- *The Rampage*, Washington High School, Phoenix, AZ

To understand the changing nature of American civic identity, I collected digital copies of each newspaper during the past forty years. I limited my sample in three ways: (1) the newspaper must have been in continuous publication since 1965, (2) the school had to have an archived collection of these papers, and (3) the school must be currently located in a metropolitan area. The only other criterion used was that the overall collection of schools must be regionally diverse. In the end, the seven school newspapers

offered a relatively broad sample of young adult opinions about politics and their communities.

While this study has traversed much landscape, it also has its limitations. I focused on a large archive of texts somewhat selectively, whereas others might have taken a smaller set of texts for more in-depth study. I chose the years 1965-2005 to explore changes in civic identity, while other dates could surely have been chosen. I also decided to focus upon young adults, but others might have been chosen just as well (i.e., senior citizens, working class urbanites, political elites, or immigrants). Finally, I archived high school newspapers exclusively rather than conduct focus groups and interviews or collect blogs and chat room transcripts. Nevertheless, by analyzing the data collected, I ultimately found four salient aspects of civic identity and organized the study around them. The rest of this chapter explores the themes that were found, what they tell us about civic identity today, and what potential questions for further research this project prompts.

Trends in Civic Identity

Contrary to popular myth, young adults in the United States have a great deal to say about the political world in which they live. There are, of course, many ways that civic identity might be enacted in every generation of young adults, but I tried to uncover the dominant attributes that have emerged in recent years. In paying close attention to how young people discuss politics and their communities, I found that over the past forty years young people have adopted four new ways of engaging their communities—they

have become more cosmopolitan, removed, protective and fragmented. These elements collectively determine how the postmodern age has affected young adults.

1. Cosmopolitan Flaneurs

Young people have become more cosmopolitan. That is to argue that today's youth locate government almost exclusively at the national and international level. This has happened as the nation-state has taken on the predominant role, both real and imagined, in young adults' political lives. Because young people rarely engage local media these days, they are left to get information from sources that predominantly focus on national and international news. In the United States, this "nationalizing" trend can also be seen in the increasingly powerful presidency, which has become the primary political connection of most young people, all of which has coincided with the rise in the sovereignty of nations and international institutions, as well as multi-national and transnational corporations. That is, the world has become interconnected in ways not imagined in previous eras. Young adults have, at a pace greater than their elders, developed a growing sense that they now belong to a much larger community of global citizens. While this makes practical sense, there has been a price to pay.

At the local level, this has left most young adults with little connection to the communities in which they live. They have lost touch with the immediacy of politics and become flaneurs in their own towns and cities, strolling about with little connection to their neighbors and the political issues down the street. This, it seems, is the greatest danger of cosmopolitanism. Stephen Toulmin has highlighted this concern, writing that:

> On the transnational level…local communities and unrepresented groups need the means of self-expression and protection….When antinuclear demonstrators march with candles through the streets of Leipzig, when prisoners of conscience bring General Pinochet's torturers into public scorn, when women's organizations speak for their fellow-women in fundamentalist states, they question the nightmare side of the Modern inheritance, and challenge the moral authority of absolute, centralized nation-states.[18]

While there is some awareness of these negative outcomes (e.g., the bumper sticker which encourages one to 'Think Globally, Act Locally'), young people seem all too willing to accept the more distanced world of national and global politics over the more immediate needs of their local communities. Such reorientation may already be damaging to American democracy, depriving it of its natural, organic grassroots.

2. Removed Volunteers

Few people would deny the dramatic changes that the economic structure of the United States has experienced over the past fifty years. Living with a sense of secure wealth not seen in prior times, the American people have become a nation of incorrigible consumers. While this has made life more enjoyable for some, it has caused a number of problems. The U.S.'s obsession with material goods can be found most notably in its addiction to debt, but a number of social changes have occurred as well. It is no longer common to find one-income families, as women have increasingly entered the

[18] Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 208.

workforce.[19] The middle class is quickly becoming a thing of the past.[20] And young adults have been transformed into one of the most marketed-to segments of society.

Quick learners, young adults have come to understand how powerful a force free-market capitalism has become in both their personal and political lives. They have responded to this in two ways. While they clearly understand the pressures they are under as consumers, they have learned that money *can* buy almost anything, including the feeling of civic engagement. Eschewing more traditional forms of political participation, young adults have begun to increasingly donate money and goods as their tokens of citizenship. Unlike their predecessors who were more inclined to join together to make an impact on their communities, today's young people prefer the more detached sense of engagement that philanthropy offers them. They give their money to fight AIDS in Africa, their blood to help the sick, and their canned food to feed the victims of national tragedies. This is not to imply that they are averse to getting their hands dirty. Young people today frequently volunteer. While much of the recent volunteerism among youth may be a result of the service-learning push found in many schools, I found plenty of evidence that young adults felt good about their volunteering. Their volunteerism is, however, not contingent on group membership and it turns out to be, therefore, more sporadic and individualized.

What young people have done by embracing volunteerism as their most active form of political participation is to give up their own governing power. Indeed, some

[19] Alan Wolfe, *One Nation After All: What Middle-Class Americans Really Think About* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).
[20] Frank Levy and Richard J. Murnane, "U.S. Earning Levels and Economic Inequality: A Review of the Recent Trends and Proposed Explanations," *Journal of Economic Literature* 30 (September 1992): 1333-81.

researchers might see these data and suggest, as political scientist Tom DeLuca does, that this is a clear sign of people's political apathy.[21] I take a different stance and argue that today's young people are not apathetic but somewhat alienated. Their volunteerism demonstrates their willingness to help others and get involved, but their removal from traditional politics often conflicts with their desire to participate. Michael Delli Carpini sums up this tension when he summarizes one recent study which showed that "there was no statistical relationship between voluntary activities such as working in a soup kitchen, tutoring, or helping to clean up a local park or river and participating in more traditional ways such as voting."[22]

3. Protective Critics

In March 2003, President George W. Bush performed one of the most obviously staged political spectacles of modern times. The President donned a United States Navy flight suit, seated himself in the cockpit of a Navy S-3B Viking, and landed (with the help of the actual pilot) on a stationary battle-ship, the USS Abraham Lincoln, which was anchored thirty miles off the San Diego coastline. All of this was done to make a single announcement. Standing on the ship in front of a carefully placed "Mission Accomplished" banner, Bush proudly announced the end to the Iraq war. Despite the fact that the military conflict in Iraq continues two full years later and that everyone reading the newspaper or watching Jay Leno knew that the event was carefully staged, Bush's media spectacle is typical of postmodern politics. Bush's landing, which brought to mind

[21] Tom DeLuca, *The Two Faces of Political Apathy* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995).
[22] Michael X Delli Carpini, Gen.com and the New Information Environment, *Political Communication* 17 (2000): 343.

Top Gun rather than a powerful wartime president, may have helped Bush among his supporters but it did little to promote civic engagement among America's youth.

Today's young people have increasingly come to understand that politics is a spectacle. While there used to be a distinction between the world of popular culture and the serious business of government, the distinction is no longer clear, and American youth have found discerning the real from the imagined to be difficult work. They have chosen to believe little of either as a result. As politics and popular culture have merged, young adults have had to find new ways of engaging politicians and governmental institutions. Already immersed in popular culture, they have turned to the prevalent criticisms offered up in pop culture for protection against the deceptions of the political spectacle.

Becoming protective critics has, however, distanced them from the world of everyday politics. Effective civic engagement requires a sense of self efficacy and that, in turn, requires that one trust the political world he or she is engaging. That this trust has been broken may, ultimately, be fueling the cycle of disregard between young adults and politicians. As young people have come to no longer trust the political sphere, many have become more critical of it and stopped engaging it altogether. Politicians who have found young people unwilling to participate have decided that it is not worth their effort to try to coax youth back into electoral politics. In the end, this feeds the young person's resolve to stay protectively distanced from mainstream politics.

4. Independent Joiners

In a report to the National Association of Secretaries of State in the closing year of the twentieth century, the Tarrance Group reported two troubling trends about the attitudes of American youth. The first concern was that "one of the obstacles to youth becoming engaged in political activity is their distrust of people." Because social trust is a key indicator for social capital, here was further evidence that young people could not be expected to join together for civic purposes. The second issue raised by researchers was that "young people's interests are extremely individualistic. Taking part in public life and collective activities like politics ranks at the bottom of their list of priorities."[23] According to their research, young people were selfish and cared little for others.

The research presented in this study suggests that things are not quite so simple. While today's young adults tend to individualize political issues, they have not completely removed themselves from joining together. In fact, it turns out that young people seem just as willing to join groups as they did in earlier generations. While this is good news, it is important to temper this optimism with the realization that many of the groups they join today bear little resemblance to those from previous decades. Today's organizations tend to focus on the individual's interests and needs instead of the community good. This attitudinal shift helps explain the following difference: with the once popular youth group 4-H having declined from 7.5 million members in 1974 to 5.6 million in just over twenty years, the U.S. Youth Soccer organization increased its membership from 100,000 to over 3 million during the same period. Young people are

[23] The Tarrance Group, New Millennium Survey: American Youth Attitudes on Politics, Citizenship, Government & Voting, http://www.stateofthevote.org/survey/.

still more than willing to group together but not apparently for civic reasons. This distinction could turn out to be an important one for civic participation in the United States in the decades ahead.

The civic identity embraced by today's young adults is therefore a complicated matter. They are responding to the political surroundings in a number of ways that are both positive and negative. That young people are cosmopolitan, voluntaristic, and sociable is good news. That they are distracted, removed, and protective is concerning. One way to make sense of the civic identity of American youth is to take a more holistic look at their changing approaches to political engagement.

Civic Identity Today—Cowboy Citizenship

Few icons have been as powerful in the United States as the cowboy. From books such as *Lonesome Dove* to movies like *The Searchers,* Westerns have been a mainstay of American culture for the past hundred years. And no single individual epitomizes the cowboy better than John Wayne. Writing of the Duke, Joan Didion offered the following assessment of what he meant for several generations of Americans:

> In a world we understood early to be characterized by venality and doubt and paralyzing ambiguities, he suggested another world, one which may or may not have existed ever but in any case existed no more: a place where a man could move free, could make his own code and live by it; a world in which, if a man did what he had to, he could one day take the girl and go

> riding through the draw and find himself home free…there at the bend in the bright river, the cottonwoods shimmering in the early morning sun.[24]

John Wayne was the American cowboy living by his own rules. He embodied the cowboy code of living independently, putting his trust in little, taking care of things himself.

The findings assembled here clearly suggest that American youth embrace a kind of *cowboy citizenship*. Invoking the term cowboy is not meant to describe real ranchers and cowhands, of course, but the mythic cowboy American culture has created. Real cowboys living in the 1800s are nothing like the myth we embrace today. As historian Paul Carlson has written, "Clearly, we have invented the modern cowboy. He is an imagined character, one created by misconception, myth, and falsehood. He is a symbol of freedom, independence, strength, and action, and our image-building has made the myth useful to advertising executives."[25] That he is mythic makes the cowboy no less salient in American culture, however. Historian William Savage argued this point twenty-five years ago:

> The cowboy hero serves two principal functions in American culture: he transmits social values, and he sells merchandise. The first of these is a political (in the sense of educational or, more often, indoctrinational) function, and the second is an economic one. They are interrelated to the

[24] Joan Didion, "John Wayne: A Love Song," *Slouching Towards Bethlehem: Essays*, 29-41. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1968.
[25] Paul H. Carlson, Myth and the Modern Cowboy, in Paul H. Carlson (ed), *The Cowboy Way: An Exploration of History and Culture* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2000), 8.

> extent that the first guarantees the efficacy of the second, while the second exploits and thereby extends the imagery of the first.[26]

The cowboy, at least the mythic creation I refer to as the American cowboy, symbolizes a vast network of closely held civic and personal assumptions about how the United States works and how its citizens regulate their lives.

The American cowboy is not, of course, only to be found on the Western frontier in the image of John Wayne or Clint Eastwood. He has been remade in any number of ways—by Bruce Willis as the ex-cop of *Die Hard,* by Sylvester Stalone as the Vietnam veteran of *Rambo,* and even by Kiefer Sutherland's anti-terrorist agent in the popular television drama *24*. Always above the law, always relying on himself, the American cowboy is a social construction that two presidents of the past twenty-five years—Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush—have gladly embraced. While the cowboy icon may be good for fighting Indians, outlaws, and (more recently) terrorists, his usefulness as a model for civic identity is less certain. Here is why:

A cowboy has no home.

As discussed in Chapter One, civic identity is concerned with the individual's reaction to three basic political forces. The first focuses on community demands. The cowboy does not have a community except, perhaps, a vague connection to the larger nation. Gene Autry explains this connection in the Cowboy Ten Commandments which were "readily adopted by the motion picture industry, and approved by church groups,

[26] William W. Savage, Jr., *The Cowboy Hero: His Image in American History and Culture* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1979), 150.

parents, and kids."[27] In addition to edicts to be honest, to help others, and to work hard, Autry's last two commandments tell the cowboy to love his country: "He must respect women, parents, and his nation's laws," because "the cowboy is a patriot." In embracing cosmopolitanism, today's young adults have incorporated this sense of nationalism into their civic identities. Perhaps as a result, they have lost touch with their local communities and have been left to wander about, not willing to put down roots (either actually or emotionally). And they only intermittently follow Autry's sixth rule, which commands the cowboy to "help people in distress." As a rather distracted set of volunteers, today's young people fit the traveling cowboy, lending a hand from time to time but riding off into the sunset at day's end.

In today's political world, young people's rootlessness gives them a kind of civic flexibility. Such adaptability comports with the kind of civic engagement that Michael Schudson has termed monitorial citizenship, whereby the individual surveys the political sphere around him looking for occasional problems needing his attention.[28] The news media become, as John Zaller notes, a burglar alarm system letting the public know when problems arise.[29] Because each issue is new and distinct from previous ones, the cowboy's versatility is an asset, giving young people more time to pursue their own interests. That these responses are happening at the global level shows, moreover, the young person's worldly sensibilities.

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[27] Albert B. Tucker, "Reel Cowboys: Cowhands and Western Movies," in *The Cowboy Way*, Paul H. Carlson, ed. Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2000: 193.
[28] Schudson, *The Good Citizen*.
[29] John Zaller, "A New Standard of News Quality: Burglar Alarms for the Monitorial Citizen," *Political Communication* 20 (2003): 109-131.

That today's young adults have a national/international perspective is not, on its own, bad. Of real concern, however, is when young people no longer identify with their local communities. Research has shown just how important a sense of the local can be in encouraging democratic principles. Indeed, studies have found that when young people have direct contact with local officials and political institutions they are far more likely to become civically engaged.[30] That the political agents they engage today cannot offer such immediate interaction may well hinder the kinds of civic identities youth are able to develop.

A cowboy eschews the institutional.

The American cowboy is not a joiner because he puts faith in very little. The only things he can rely on are his family, his closest friends, and the simple belief that life comes down to an easy distinction between right and wrong. William Savage offers this image when writing of John Wayne: "On film Wayne is the hard man, gentle with family and friends, who perceives evil and eradicates it. There is no accommodation, no compromise, only the sort of wisdom that allows consideration of the world in stark contrasts of black and white."[31] As a result, the American cowboy, while a patriot, has little regard for formal governmental institutions or political organizations. One can hardly imagine, that is, a cowboy union fighting for better working conditions or higher pay. Too, while today's politicians often don cowboy garb for political purposes, the true American cowboy would not run for the senate or join a political party. Today's youth

[30] Diane Ravitch and Joseph P. Viteritti (eds.), *Making Good Citizens: Education and Civil Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
[31] Savage, *The Cowboy Hero*, 28.

have integrated such attitudes into their civic identities by largely ignoring *the processes of governance.* And young adults' tendencies to join groups only when doing so serves their immediate needs makes them sporadic members of posses rather than parts of sustainable civic organizations.

One can hardly blame young people for their protective attitudes. The United States government has been littered over the past several decades with deceptive public officials gleefully exposed by the news media. From President Richard Nixon to former Senate Majority Leader Tom Delay, ample evidence has been presented that politicians sometimes cannot be trusted. Given these very real deceptions, today's youth can be forgiven their skepticism, at least in part. Faced with a used car salesman or an online acquaintance, questioning what one sees is necessary and parents are surely wise to instruct their children to never talk to strangers. And for many young people today, politicians are mostly strangers.

The danger to American democracy in all of this is the possibility of manufacturing a set of governmental officials that does not have to answer to the people. This same matter was a concern for the architects of the United States Constitution, who sought to build a republican system of government in which a large number of citizens would hold their representatives accountable. That is, the cure for corrupt public officials is to vote them out of office. But what if voters fail to show up at the polls? Democracy suffers and unethical elected officials remain in office, only solidifying the cowboy's belief that government cannot be trusted.

A cowboy goes it alone.

In the 1962 classic *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, John Wayne's character, Tom Doniphon, tells Jimmy Stewart's Ransom Stoddard, "Out here a man settles his own problems." When it comes to how today's young people have learned to *recognize power relations*, Wayne's words are prophetic. As Norman B. Schwartz has written, the American cowboy displayed in popular culture places a high value on rugged individualism.[32] So, too, do young people. Today's youth have dangerously removed themselves from traditional politics and civic organizations and come to see most political issues as personal at root. This personalization has given them a strong sense of independence. When faced with a problem they do not turn to others for help or, at least, not to institutionalized others.

The United States has long been a nation that prizes individualism. In today's personality driven sports and entertainment industries, this is even truer. But young people have also been getting the message that they need to be more self-reliant in the political sphere. Just as there has been an increasing push toward free market capitalism over the past several decades, the American public has also witnessed a decline of the social welfare mechanisms administered by Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, and Lyndon Johnson. This larger political trend can be seen in the resounding failure of former President Bill Clinton's universal health care plan and in President George W. Bush's push to privatize social security. In both instances, the American

[32] Norman B. Schwartz, Villainous Cowboys and Backward Peasants: Popular Culture and Development Concepts, *Journal of Popular Culture* 15(4): 105-113.

people were told to take responsibility for their own needs. American youth have heeded this directive and learned to take care of themselves politically as well.

While some might argue that young people's tendency to go-it-alone should be encouraged, democracy also requires working together. This is a concern that sociologist Robert Wuthnow has noted:

> Today, a sizable number of Americans have withdrawn from service clubs, labor unions, and churches, apparently believing that it makes little difference whether they engage in civic activities or not….It is easy to infer from such evidence that many Americans are turning their backs on the general welfare and pursuing their own interests as single-mindedly as possible.[33]

The reality is that as Americans have increasingly pulled away from collective pursuits, they have come to distrust others and lose a sense of self-efficacy in the process. This trend, many worry, can only lead to a fragmented sense of the social fabric. This is the lonely state the modern cowboy/citizen embraces. Or as the contemporary cowboy Willie Nelson sings in *My Heroes Have Always Been Cowboys*, "Cowboys are special with their own brand of misery/From being alone too long."

Democracy takes work and it is work worth doing. A healthy model of democracy requires a number of things from its citizens including a connection to various communities, a willingness to trust others, and an understanding that politics takes collective effort. The cowboy/citizen rejects all these claims by riding in the opposite

[33] Robert Wuthnow, *Loose Connections: Joining Together in America's Fragmented Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 3.

direction. Ultimately, the American republic suffers from the sense of emptiness he leaves behind.

Civic Identity's Future Concerns

In this study, I have attempted to present the civic identity of young people as it appears today. I surveyed forty years of public discourse and offered a current assessment of today's youth. Looking at high school newspapers across the past four decades revealed the changing nature of civic engagement in the United States. Knowing how young people enact their civic identity could prove useful in finding ways to strengthen democratic ties among the populace at large. But this study has also produced a number of questions when answering those with which it began.

While this study focused on a diverse collection of young people, it did not explore the civic identities of the nation's subgroups. I found no clear differences between the schools, for example, according to racial differences. Nor did I see important distinctions explained by gender. Exploring such differences further could prove beneficial to understanding civic identity writ large. Do different racial groups present markedly different civic identities? Is there a distinction between young women and men in how they engage their communities? A report by the United States Census Bureau shows that a larger percentage of women voted in 2004 than did men, and it also presents the troubling result that Non-Hispanic Whites still vote at a much higher rate

than Blacks or Hispanics.[34] Understanding these trends is important for leveling the electoral playing field.

We also need to understand how other subgroups of Americans engage their communities. While these groups are often overlooked, they represent important sections of the American public. Ethnographer Julie Lindquist, for example, has opened up this area with her study of the political attitudes found in a working-class bar on the outskirts of Chicago. As Lindquist writes of the group she studied, "taken as a whole, what Smokehousers seem to want is what everybody wants: to figure out how the world works and to understand their place in it."[35] This simple approach to the people she observed revealed that they were far more politically aware than many might have believed. Katherine Cramer Walsh has also done work in this area by studying a group of senior citizens that met daily at a local diner for breakfast and a women's group that met weekly in the basement of a church. Both groups, it turns out, had highly complex political attitudes and beliefs.[36] Understanding more about such groups, whether they are politically active or inactive, is important for a deeper understanding of the civic identity in the nation as a whole.

In addition to studying other American subgroups, we need to study other texts produced by young adults to see if specific types of symbolic cues lend themselves to more positive democratic outcomes. The Internet offers a rich area for studying the civic

[34] Voting and Registration in the Election of 2004, *United State Census Bureau*, Current Population Report, March 2006.
[35] Julie Lindquist, *A Place to Stand: Politics and Persuasion in a Working-Class Bar* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2002).
[36] Katherine Cramer Walsh, *Talking about Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

identities of young adults. While research on the web is still in its early stages, one central question that has already arisen is whether it promotes democratic values. The answers to that question have been anything but consistent.[37] Still, such matters need to be understood. One recent study puts it this way:

> If, in America's long-term future, the Internet is going to make a positive contribution on civic engagement and social capital, it will do so primarily through the nation's youth. This is true for three obvious reasons. First, youth represent the nation's future. Second, youth are the most Internet friendly age cohort in the nation. Third, youth are presently the least politically engaged and active age cohort.[38]

While the Internet may not be able to solve the third point on its own, examining how young people use it and what types of political information gets discussed in chat rooms and on blogs are clear places to start.

An additional question suggested by this study is one that has plagued political socialization researchers for decades: Won't young people naturally become more politically engaged as they get older? As was mentioned in Chapter One, there is evidence that the political attitudes formed in adolescence continue through adulthood. It is also true, however, that individuals are more likely to vote as they get older, suggesting that some behavioral change is normal. Studying civic identity across the lifespan would allow one to get a clearer understanding of how attitudes and behaviors change with, or in

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[37] For a collection of current research, see David M. Anderson and Michael Cornfield (eds.), *The Civic Web: Online Politics and Democratic Values* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
[38] Steve Davis, Larry Elin, and Grant Reeher, *Click On Democracy: The Internet's Power to Change Political Apathy into Civic Action* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002), 258.

spite of, each other. This would necessitate a longitudinal study requiring patience, time, and resources, but it would be time and money well spent.

The final question raised by this study is more applied. How does one instill more efficacious civic identity in American youth? While making my arguments here, I have tried to avoid blaming youth for the attitudes they hold, but the picture presented in the end is not a positive one for the civic health of the United States. These matters are important to understand, however, if we are to find new ways of reinvigorating the political sphere. Toward that end, Stephen Macedo has recently published the work of a number of notable political scientists concerned with political participation. Macedo assembled the group of authors because he believed, first and foremost, that American democracy could be improved. Macedo identified three main reasons why he and his colleagues believed it was important to promote civic engagement:

> First, civic engagement enhances the quality of democratic governance….Second, the promise of democratic life is not simply that government by the people yields the most excellent governance. It is also—and perhaps mainly—that government is legitimate only when the people as a whole participate in their own self rule….Third, participation can enhance the quality of citizen's lives.[39]

Macedo's sentiment sounds hopeful for those concerned with strengthening civic identity. But how do we go about effecting such outcomes? What strategies are best

[39] Stephen Macedo, *Democracy at Risk: How Political Choices Undermine Citizen Participation, and What We Can Do About It* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 4.

suited to increasing political participation and, subsequently, to making the nation a better place to live? How does one counteract the negative effects of cowboy citizenship?

There is no shortage of advice about how to increase civic engagement in the United States. John Gastil and other would argue that we need, first and foremost, to get the American people talking to one another by increasing the number and quality of public deliberations,[40] even though the notion that conversation is the lifeblood of democracy has been questioned by some.[41] Others might suggest that we simply need to make voting easier and, while that may very well increase voter turnout, there is no reason to believe that other forms of civic engagement would be similarly stimulated. Still others would push for shorter campaign cycles to avoid boring the American public,[42] and some are calling for a renewed devotion to service-learning in high school.[43] All of these ideas are fine, but they also may be treating the symptoms and not the cause of civic disengagement. The way young people have come to understand the political sphere has changed drastically over the past four decades. To reverse the negative effects of these learning patterns, scholars and community activists must present alternative models of civic identity.

Today's young people engage in a civic identity that is rooted in the American cowboy. Young Americans have left home, trust nothing, and go-it-alone. To counteract

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[40] See John Gastil and Peter Levine (eds.), *The Deliberative Democracy Handbook: Strategies for Effective Civic Engagement in the 21st Century* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1995).
[41] See Michael Schudson, "Why Conversation is not the Soul of Democracy," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 14 (1997), 297-309.
[42] Martin P. Wattenberg, *Where Have All the Voters Gone?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
[43] Diana Owen, "Service Learning and Political Socialization," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (September 2000): 638-40.

this approach, a new conceptualization is needed that encourages communal responsibility, what might be called a kind of maternal citizenship.

Trading mothers for cowboys is not to embrace a new kind of essentialism. Scientist Stephen Jay Gould cautioned against just such an enterprise when arguing that he "would rather label the whole enterprise of setting a biological value upon groups for what it is: irrelevant and highly injurious."[44] Although genetic studies have begun to increasingly find real differences between the X and Y chromosomes, I am concerned here with a broader conception of motherhood.

While there are exceptions to every generalization, research has indicated that mothers across cultures have a set of shared characteristics. Mary Boor Tonn has summed up these characteristics by arguing that "mothering is a diverse and complex practice, to be sure. Nonetheless, most mothers of all stripes appear to share three general goals: securing their children's physical survival, furthering their emotional and intellectual growth and independence, and cultivating their connection and accountability to their social group."[45] This explains why the mother, and not the father, represents the home. It also indicates how mothers can help teach their children to cultivate greater levels of social trust, in part because women are more selfless than men on average.[46]

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[44] Stephen Jay Gould, "Women's Brains," *The Panda's Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1980): 152-59.
[45] Mari Boor Tonn, Militant Motherhood: Labor's Mary Harris 'Mother' Jones, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 82(February 1996): 4.
[46] See Catherine C. Eckel and Philip J. Grossman, Are Women Less Selfish Than Men?: Evidence From Dictator Experiments, *The Economic Journal* 108 (May), 726-735., for their findings and a review of similar findings in sociology and psychology.

And women's tendencies to consider others when making political decisions would help foster a sense of togetherness that resists the masculinist tendency to go it alone.[47]

A model of maternal citizenship would be one, then, that promotes local connections, social trust, and civic organizations, thereby countering the effects of cowboy citizenship. These two discursive models of civic identity are, then, markedly different. Take, for example, the following editorials appearing in the October 30, 1998, issue of the *Denebola* at Boston's Newton South High School. The first selection is an argument against political correctness and freely uses the language of the cowboy:

> Political correctness is the latest trend, and an open mind is a necessary accessory….This emphasis on diversity is supposed to increase freedom and let people think the way they choose….However, society has come to force this political and social openness on people unfairly. It infringes upon my right to my own opinion….I also have no desire to fight for the rights of every interest group. I am content to deal with issues directly affecting me rather than with the problems of others….I want to decide for myself who and what I like and what I believe in. If this enforced diversity continues, we will soon have the P.C. Gestapo walking the halls getting rid of those who do not accept everyone….We must let everyone believe what he or she chooses. Problems only arise when beliefs prevent others from having their own opinion. If social advancement is impossible, then

[47] Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris have found, for instance, a global trend in industrialized societies for female voters to move toward the "left" as they think more often of their fellow citizens in egalitarian ways. "The Development Theory of the Gender Gap: Women's and Men's Voting Behavior in Global Perspective," *International Political Science Review* 21 (2000): 441-63.

> an interest group may help. However, I should not be made to support this group or not voice my opinion against it.[48]

This student writes as an individual who wants to be left alone to believe what he believes. He does not trust those who support programs promoting social diversity, eagerly referring to them as the "Gestapo." There is no mention here of local concerns and, while "an interest group may help" solve problems, he himself wants no part of such groups. The sounds of cowboy citizenship could not be clearer. One can imagine the author tipping his ten gallon hat when finishing his argument.

The second editorial speaks to the related issue of homosexuality and tolerance. It evokes the sound of maternal citizenship:

> The death of college student Matthew Shepard has had an impact on many people. Although this is certainly not the first time a person has been beaten and killed because of intolerance, this incident should not be forgotten anytime soon. The country should take measures to enact federal legislature which extends to protect homosexual members of our society. Most people, including a large coalition of those who disagree with homosexuality, are shocked at the brutality which has been inflicted upon an innocent human being….The incident has brought conflict concerning homosexuality to the front pages of the local publications and the forefront of many people's thoughts. Many people are now becoming more aware of issues that they would have been tempted to ignore before. This

[48] Hate exists throughout nation, *Denebola*, October 30, 1998.

> heightened awareness has opened new discussions on federal policy concerning hate crimes….Newton South students do not have to look as far as the newspaper headlines to be aware of the intolerance against gays and lesbians or people who are perceived to be so. Although Newton South is unusually safe in terms of violence against gay and lesbian students, it is difficult to walk through the halls and to not hear the language which is used against them daily.[49]

Here the student shows a trust for others suggesting that "most people" were "shocked" at Matthew Shepard's killing, even those who might not share her views. One also finds a willingness to believe that government can help solve the problem of hate crimes and that "the country" should demand federal legislative action. Our author even makes the issue local by pointing out the language students use in the hallways of Newton South to denigrate homosexuals. That the author was profiled in an earlier article as a member of the "student organized Gay-Straight Alliance" is not the least bit surprising.[50] This student has clearly learned to think of civic engagement in immediate, intimate, and sociocentric ways.

While it may not be heard frequently, the sounds of maternal citizenship must be encouraged. A civic identity rooted in motherhood, admittedly, is far less exciting than one modeled after the American cowboy. The maternal model goes against the news media's competitive framing of politics and the laissez faire attitudes of free market capitalism. Although the maternal model is more homely and communal, it is for these

[49] Student legislature needed for combat, *Denebola*, October 30, 1998.
[50] Students Speak at Annual Forum, *Denebola*, December 23, 1997.

very reasons that it is well attuned to civic responsibilities in a democratic republic. If a maternal discourse could be developed and promoted in homes and schools, political socialization principles suggest it could alter the civic views of a new generation. That young people need an alternative to cowboyism seems all too evident.

Conclusion

While the forces of postmodernity help explain the changes in civic identity over the past forty years, they do not explain why American youth have been so willing to embrace cowboy citizenship. The traditions of political culture in the United States do offer an explanation, however. American politics has long been a male-dominated institution. A simple look at the United States House of Representatives (supposedly the branch of federal government closest to the people's sympathies[51]) shows that while women in the U.S. account for almost 51 percent of the population, they make up only 15.4% of U.S. representatives.[52] The news media help maintain this masculine bias through their conflictual news routines. Too, longstanding cultural assumptions about gender roles still structure many people's political attitudes. Given the masculinist foundations of American politics, it is little wonder that cowboy citizenship fits so comfortably into today's youth culture.

Clearly, more feminine, if not feminist, assumptions are needed as political supplements to such over-determinations. Bringing more women into the political process can only be good for American democracy. Some observers even go so far as to

[51] Hamilton, Madison and Jay, *The Federalist Papers*.
[52] http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html. The percentage of women in the House simply reflects the actual number of seats held by women (67) to the total number (435).

suggest that women are the only answer for some of the problems the U.S. faces today. Public intellectual and medical doctor Lewis Thomas offered just such an argument when questioning how women might handle the issue of nuclear weapons:

> I am, in short, swept off my feet by women, and I do not think they have yet been assigned the place in the world's affairs that they are biologically made for….This brings me to a proposal. Talking all in all, the history of human governments suggests to me that the men of the earth have had a long enough run at running things; their record of folly is now so detailed and documented as to make anyone fear the future in the hands. It is time for a change. Put the women in charge….I haven't any doubt at all what they will do with this issue, possessing as they do some extra genes for understanding and appreciating children.[53]

Mothers are not always good for their children. They can love them too much and make them overly dependent. They can love them too little and create troubled men and women. And they can be overly protective, not allowing their children to grow into the independent adults they need to become. A maternal citizenship, then, is not without its limitations. Fiscal conservatives might argue that young people socialized by feminine assumptions would become too reliant on government. Libertarians could claim that maternalism infringes upon the freedoms and vaunted independence of the American people. And liberals may fear that such an approach will limit the citizen's ability to demand the benefits society should offer them. Maternal citizenship is not a perfect

[53] Lewis Thomas, "Scabies, Scrapie," *The Youngest Science: Notes of a Medicine-Watcher*, reprint edition (New York: Penguin, 1983): 233-38.

solution but it does offer today's youth a stark contrast to the civic identities they have constructed, especially when they do not know how and why they have constructed them.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote that "men are what their mothers made them." If we can forgive Emerson the paternal instincts of the 19th century, we might profit from the notion that people can become what a maternal civic identity allows them to become. A new approach rooted in maternal citizenship offers a kind of political engagement better aligned to democratic principles and to the exigencies of the current age. A maternal model is also better attuned to fostering stronger global communities needed for long-term international peace, especially in a post-9/11 world. The difference between the cowboy and maternal models is perhaps best summed up by the humor of Robin Williams who recently joked that "the Statue of Liberty is no longer saying, 'Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses.' She's got a baseball bat and yelling, 'You want a piece of me?'" This study has asked whether cowboys alone can make a democracy thrive. My suggestion is that they cannot. Mothers, too, are needed.

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